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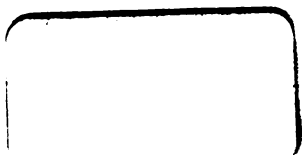
THE STREET OF ADVENTURE

... PHILIP GIBBS ...

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THE STREET OF ADVENTURE

THE STREET OF ADVENTURE

BY
PHILIP GIBBS

AUTHORIZED AMERICAN EDITION
WITH A SPECIAL PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR



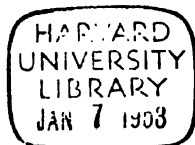
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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

TO THE NEW AUTHORIZED AMERICAN EDITION.

THIS novel of journalistic life in London was written ten years ago. To me, and to those characters in the book who still survive, that seems a life-time back. Since then I have seen two wars—the Balkan war which was the storm-cloud in Europe heralding the universal deluge, and the Great War itself which has left the world bleeding from many wounds, and the soul of the world stricken by the remembrance of millions of dead boys, and of untold agonies, brutalities, abominations, in those slaughter fields where civilization was submerged. The Street of Adventure which I portrayed in this tale was (though none of us guessed) only a narrow alley-way leading to an adventure so terrific in its melodrama that it annihilated the journalistic "scoop," and newspaper competition in England (for all journals were under military law and no more than bulletins of official news) and all the traditions, customs, and purpose of journalistic life.

Those young newspaper men of whom I write in this book regarded the work as a peep-show of which they were critics and onlookers; but when the War came they found that they could no longer be aloof from life, nor go to its pageantry and its drama with Press tickets for the "show" and a cynical amusement at the folly of human nature. They became part of the pageant, actors in the drama. They were part of that pageantry of English youth which tramped up the roads of war to the Ypres salient and the Somme battlefields. They took their turn

on the stage lighted by shell fire and by white rockets which rose all night from the trenches, revealing a row of gashed trees, a stretch of mangled earth, and the barbed wire hedges of the enemy's front line. Many of their bodies lie under little wooden crosses in France and Flanders. They did well, most of them.

I met my old comrades of Fleet Street as company officers, even as majors and colonels, two of them with the exalted rank of General. They laughed when I met them and said, "This is a great kind of 'stunt'!" or "We thought we knew a lot in Fleet Street. . . . Now we're beginning to find out!" One character in this book, whom I met one night at a fancy dress ball—he was, I remember, in the costume of Sir Francis Drake—became a gunner in a field battery. During the war I used to see him now and then in odd places, and once he drew me aside and said, "I can't stand this much longer. My nerve is beginning to crack. It's not that I am afraid of death—that is nothing!—but this constant shell fire shakes one to bits." He was killed somewhere beyond the Somme.

Some of them remembered "The Street of Adventure," which had put their old way of life into the form of fiction. One day in 1915 I was up in "Plug Street" Village, a most unhealthy spot not far from Armentières, and a young officer of a London regiment which had just been in a desperate little fight, sent word for me to visit him in his billet. He was taking a bath in a big tub in the loft of a shell-broken house and stretched out a soapy hand to me. "I say," he began, "you ought to have let Frank Luttrell marry Katherine. It was too bad of you to have it like that!" At another time I went up to our outpost line beyond Gommecourt, where a trench mortar company had made a rush into a place called Pigeon Wood and were arranging to blow the Germans out of

another place called Kite Copse, two hundred yards away. They were anxious for me to see the "show," and on the way up a sergeant, who was my guide across the battlefield where German "crumps" were bursting, turned to me with a grin and said, "This is another 'Street of Adventure.' I liked the other best!"

Unlike many colleagues in Fleet Street, I still remained an onlooker, as an official war-correspondent with the British Armies in the Field. I was still the servant of Fleet Street, writing words, words, words, when all the world was dying—the world I had known. I hated the job, but it had to be done, so that the pictures of war should be described, and the agonies of war known, and the valour of youth recorded. I did not care a damn about Fleet Street then. I wrote for the sake of the soldiers. I wrote as a chronicler of their history and their sufferings; and I shared in my soul the things they feared, and their tragic doubts and despairs, and the intolerable boredom of exile from normal life, and the smells and sights and sounds of the fields in which they fought. I was not quite aloof, nor only an onlooker. . . .

In this novel there is a true picture of Fleet Street before the war. Many of the characters have been recognised as real people and have forgiven me for my portraits of themselves, not unkindly in intention even when touched with caricature, as in one or two cases. It is no secret now that the newspaper was "The Tribune," which lived and died before the war, as one of the most unhappy adventures in Fleet Street. Many of the incidents were pure inventions on my part, typical of journalistic life in London, but not associated with actual happenings in "The Tribune" office, and some of the minor characters and their actions have no reference to the history of that newspaper. What is more real, I think, than the incidental episodes of the narrative is the atmosphere

and psychology of the journalistic picture, which ought to be true because it is part of my own life. The spirit of youth, with its hopes and laughter and tears, dwells a little, perhaps, in this Street of Adventure, and is, I imagine, the secret of its success. It is a youthfulness which has passed as far as I am concerned—four and a half years of war knock the boyhood out of one's heart—but it will be renewed by other young men and women following in the footsteps of Frank Luttrell and Katherine Halstead down the old street where there are many ghosts.

London,

May, 1919.

THE STREET OF ADVENTURE

THE STREET OF ADVENTURE

CHAPTER I

A YOUNG man in a grey tweed suit and a bowler hat stood gazing from the opposite side of the way at the swing door of a long white building in a narrow street. Several times he had walked from one end of the street to the other, stopping once to light a cigarette with a nervous hand, and then throwing it away after a few whiffs. The doorway at which he now stared seemed to have a fascination of a strange kind, attracting and repelling him at the same time. Once he crossed the road at a sharp pace as if he would go straight up the steps into the building, and then turned off again and strolled away. But he came back, and at last, with a low, nervous laugh as though amused at his own hesitation, took the steps two at a time, and went through the brass-bound doors.

Inside, a commissionaire sat reading a pink paper in a box-office with a glass window. The young man presented his card, and asked if Mr. Bellamy were in. The commissionaire, without lifting his eyes from the paper, jerked his thumb in the direction of a staircase with tiled walls like an underground lavatory. The visitor went up, stopping at a bend of the stairs to lift his hat and pass a hand over a high, narrow forehead. A slight flush had crept into his boyish, clean-shaven face.

On the first floor of the big building a bullet-headed man with the face of a professional pugilist sat at a desk placed across the landing. On six chairs at right angles to him sat six boys in uniforms, sucking lollipops and reading penny dreadfuls with flaming covers.

The young man put his card on the desk, and asked again if Mr. Bellamy were in.

"No," said the man with the pugnacious face. He turned to one of the boys. "When you've made yerself sick with them suckers," he said, "p'raps you'll take this to the Russian Embassy. And if you're not back in half an hour I'll give you a thick ear, and don't forget it."

The boy changed the lollipop from one side of his face to the other, put a round messenger's cap at a more acute angle over one ear, took a big envelope from the man at the desk, kicked one of his comrades on the shin, and then bounded down the stairs.

The young man in the grey suit was fingering his card.

"When will Mr. Bellamy be back?" he asked.

"Perhaps ten or eleven to-night," said the man at the desk carelessly. "Very uncertain. Leave a message? See anyone else?" He strode over to one of the boys and boxed his ear smartly. "'Aven't I told you not to kick your 'eels against the wall, you blasted little fool? Do it again, and I'll put you outside."

"Strange!" said the young man, "I have an appointment with him."

"Oh," said the man at the desk, "why didn't you say so before?" He took up the card and read the name.

"Francis Luttrell. . . . Oh yes, the Chief is expecting you. But you'll have to wait. He's up to his ears."

"Then he is in!" said the visitor.

"Did I say he wasn't? My mistake. Stand along the passage there; I'll put you through when he's ready."

Francis Luttrell went past the desk and stood against the wall at an angle of two long corridors, into which opened a number of small doors—opened and shut ceaselessly, it seemed. The inhabitants of the big building seemed to be playing a game of “family post.” At every minute or so one of the doors would open violently, and a man would come out with a bundle of papers or letters in his hand, and go quickly into one of the other rooms along the corridors. Sometimes two or three of them would pop out of the doors at the same time and stand for a few moments talking in low voices, with outbursts of laughter, in the passages. They seemed to be confiding extraordinary secrets to each other, or to be plotting some dreadful conspiracy. Luttrell, the boyish man in the grey suit, whose senses were sharpened by an excitement which made him almost feverish, overheard whispered ejaculations of surprise. “Great Scott!” “You don’t say so!” “Well, that’s the limit.” One man a little dark whimsical man, smartly dressed in black, with a brilliant tall hat at a jaunty angle seemed to have a good story to tell. He whispered it to five different men at intervals, illustrating it by dramatic action with a silver-knobbed stick. It always had a strong effect. Each man leant back against the wall, and laughed until the tears came into his eyes. Luttrell smiled irresistibly at the sight of this mirth and wondered what the story was. Presently the whimsical little man, stroking a neat black moustache, passed down the corridor, and glanced at Luttrell with eyes in which was still a glint of merriment. It almost seemed as if he were tempted to tell him the story, but he confided it to the man at the desk, who was seized with spasms of laughter, which caused the five remaining messenger boys to grin from ear to ear.

The little dark man raised his hand. “Hush, not a

word!" he said solemnly. Then making a pass with his stick at one of the messenger boys, and neatly striking his middle button with a sharp click, he went downstairs, jauntily humming a music-hall song.

He came back for a second, poking his face round the corner of the passage. "Tell the Chief I shall be back again. I'm just going over the way for a soul-searcher."

"You've all the luck, Mr. Quin," said the man at the desk. Luttrell still waited for the interview which would decide his future career. The strain of a high nervous tension had a curious physical effect on him. Although it was a warm day, his hands became as cold as ice. Presently he was seized with a kind of terror at the thought of seeing the man for whom he was waiting, and he was tempted to tell the clerk at the desk that he had another engagement and would call again.

"How long will it be before Mr. Bellamy is disengaged?" he asked.

"Don't know," said the man curtly. But he gave Luttrell's card to one of the boys and told him to take it to the Chief. Luttrell drew a long breath. Well, at any rate, he was getting nearer to that great man who was to decide his fate.

The boy went into the room immediately opposite Luttrell's standpoint, and through a door half-opened Luttrell saw into a large, comfortably-furnished room, where a little man with light-brown hair, smoothly brushed, sat in front of a long desk smoking a cigar and reading a paper. He looked up to glance at the card, and then the boy came out and closed the door.

"Will see you in a minute," said the boy. The "minute" lasted half an hour, during which time a bell sounded sharply from the room at intervals, causing one of the boys to bounce up, pop his head through the door, and rush off to fetch one of the occupants of the

rooms down the corridor. Among those who entered was a girl in a flowered muslin dress with a picture hat. She darted a quick glance at Luttrell, and he saw that she had fluffy brown hair, and a piquant, pretty face. She stayed inside the room for ten minutes, and Luttrell heard the girl's laugh ringing out, and a man's voice laughing also, more quietly.

Luttrell still waited. It seemed that everyone had the right of access to that room except himself. He had a longing to do violence to the man at the desk who ignored his restlessness and sent his small battalion of boys chivying away on endless errands along the corridors. Other messenger boys came up the stairs and banged pink envelopes on to the desk, which were immediately sent up to various rooms. A constant stream of visitors came also and asked whether Mr. Bellamy were in. They would not keep him half a minute. The man at the desk lied to most of them with imperturbable insolence, and only two were told the truth and ranged alongside Luttrell to take their turn.

For a moment Luttrell forgot his weariness of spirit and flesh in the interest aroused by the appearance of a newcomer. It was an extraordinarily tall young man, about six feet three in height, who came sauntering in with an air of quiet importance. He had a long, clean-shaven face, which would have been singularly handsome but for rather tired and lack-lustre eyes. He was dressed like a dandy of the Georgian period, in a wide-brimmed tall hat, a long frock overcoat tight at the waist, and peg-top trousers, with polish patent boots.

In a suave, melancholy tone he addressed the man at the desk—

"Are there any letters for me this evening, Mr. Leach?"

The man at the desk gave his mouth a comical twist and took a bundle out of a range of pigeonholes.

"Eight," he said, "and five postcards from a lady named Beatrice, who says she is going to drown herself if you don't write. They've been here a week, so I suppose the inquest is over."

The tall young man flushed ever so slightly, and regarded the man at the desk with a basilisk look out of his grey eyes.

"So you read my private correspondence," he said quietly, in a low, mournful voice. "I shall report this to the Chief."

Leach, the man at the desk, sprang up in a sudden passion—

"Look 'ere, Mr. Christopher Codrington," he said in a low voice, "if there's to be any tale-telling I can tell the longest story, and don't you forget it."

He made a step forward, but the tall young man put up a long white hand with quiet dignity.

"Go to your place, Mr. Leach," he said, "your breath is bad. It is most offensive to me."

He lifted a small gold bottle hanging to a bunch of seals and put it to his nose in a languid, graceful way. Then he passed the desk with a long stride.

The door opposite Luttrell opened violently, and the girl in the muslin dress came out with a ripple of laughter. She nearly collided with the man who had been called Codrington. He stepped back and took off his tall hat, revealing a high forehead and smooth hair of palest gold.

"Good-morning, Miss Kitty," he said in his melancholy voice, "it is good to see you so merry on this dull day. It is like sunshine in a place of gloom."

"That phrase was in your copy yesterday," said the

girl, tipping up her face in a quizzical way to smile at the tall young man who bent down towards her.

He fingered a miniature on her breast in an absent-minded way.

"Was it?" he said gloomily. "It is a simple, foolish one."

He whispered something into the ear of the girl, who hit him smartly across the chest with a roll of cartridge papers.

"Tush," said Mr. Christopher Codrington, "you will spoil one of your pretty sketches—one of those lovely unnatural ladies, with wasp waists and elongated limbs."

"I will spoil your shirt-front, if you are so absurd," said the girl in the muslin frock. Then she put her hand on his arm. "I say, Chris," she said, "you and I have got to go to the Gala night of the Opera! I have just got a promise from the Chief."

"That will cost me a new pair of patent boots," said the tall young man, looking down at his feet with an air of deep melancholy. "And I haven't paid for these yet."

He moved down the corridor with the girl, stepping aside and bowing gravely to let her enter one of the rooms, into which he followed her.

Francis Luttrell, who had listened to the dialogue, suddenly found that his hour of expectancy was at an end.

"Now, then, the Chief will see you," said Leach, the man at the desk, opening the door which had opened and shut so often.

Luttrell flushed up to the eyes, took off his bowler hat, and went inside, the door being closed behind him.

"Morning," said a cheerful voice at his elbow. "Sit down over there, won't you—by the desk. I'm just cleaning myself a little. Filthy place this office."

Luttrell started. He had expected to find the great

man still seated at his desk, but he was standing with his coat and waistcoat off, in front of a wash-basin close to the door.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bellamy," said Luttrell nervously. He took the chair by the desk and glanced over at the man who was washing himself. He was a smart, soldierly little fellow, with smooth brown hair and a little brown moustache. There was an air of alertness in his figure, in the poise of his head, and both his eyes and mouth seemed to suggest a sense of humour. For a moment his eyes met those of the young man sitting by the side of the desk, who was conscious that in one quick, shrewd glance he had been photographed and measured up in the mind of that dapper man.

Silas Bellamy whistled a tune as he brushed his hair, and smiled at his own thoughts as he cleaned his already exquisitely clean nails and polished them up with a little tool. He did not take the slightest notice of Luttrell, who was hot with nervousness and fervently hoping that this embarrassing silence would soon be broken.

It was broken when Bellamy got into his coat.

"May Satan seize my tailor," he said. "I would rather be boiled in oil than wear a coat tight under the arms."

He looked at himself once more in the glass, brushed a speck of dust off his shoulder, tightened his tie a little, and then sat down at his desk with a cheery "Now, then."

Luttrell cleared his throat and waited for the opening of a conversation which he had rehearsed in imagination a hundred times.

Bellamy, however, was not in a hurry to talk business, though Luttrell had left three men outside clamouring to see him. He took up a bayonet, brightly polished, which had lain on a batch of papers, and passed his finger down the blade.

"I keep this for some of my men," he said. "When I am in a very murderous mood I just show it to them. It puts the fear of God into their hearts, I can tell you!"

"It looks a dangerous weapon," said Luttrell, laughing nervously. Then he said in a tentative way, "Did you get Philip Gibbs's letter?"

The Chief ignored this question and turned on the electric lamp to scrutinise a spot of rust on the bayonet blade. "That's blood," he said, with a note of pride in his voice. "This has killed its man. I drew it out of a Boer's ribs at Colenso." He twisted his little brown moustache. "By Jove! I saw some ghastly sights there. I could curdle your young blood for you! I was in charge of the Soldiers' Aid Fund, and scoured the whole field of war. That's still an untold tale. I could blast some pretty reputations if I told the truth. But, of course, the truth is the last thing told by pressmen."

Luttrell allowed himself to look surprised.

"Is it?" he said; "I thought that that was what they had to do."

The Chief looked at him for a moment with lifted eyebrows.

"My dear boy," he said, "surely, surely, you don't mean to say——"

The telephone bell rang on the desk and the Chief taking off the receiver said, "Excuse me," to Luttrell, and "'ulloo, 'ulloo," into the mouthpiece.

Luttrell noticed a gleam of affectionate amusement in the little man's eyes, and listened to his disconnected sentences.

"What, not in bed yet! . . . you abandoned young person. . . . I forgot to buy that Teddy bear? God bless my soul, so I did. . . . It's too late now. I'll buy it tomorrow. Yes, honour bright! No, I shan't be home till you're most ready to wake up. . . . Now, now,

none of your cheek, young woman! Good-bye, little lady. Love to Mrs. Mother." He put on the receiver and laughed softly.

"That's my daughter," he said, "aged six, and a dominating young person. I haven't seen her for a week except when I've been in bed."

He pressed his hands to his eyes and yawned.

"Lord, how sleepy I am! . . . Do you mind touching that bell?"

Luttrell pressed an electric button, and a boy who seemed to be at the end of the wire pounced into the room.

"Glass of milk, Tommy," said the Chief, giving him sixpence.

"Yussur," said the boy, grinning. A few minutes later he came back with a glass of liquid of deep yellow tint smelling strongly of whisky. The Chief drank it at a breath.

"Ah! that's better. Wonderfully good stuff—milk!"

"Let's see," he said, after a pause, during which he arranged one or two papers on a desk in apple-pie order, "you mentioned that letter by young Gibbs, didn't you? Nice fellow, Gibbs, in his own line, don't you know. Here it is. What does he say? H'm, h'm." He scanned through the letter, reading out phrases with interpolations.

"'Bright literary style!' There's more damned nonsense talked about style than anything else. Say what you've got to say in the simplest possible way. 'Has a distinct touch of imagination.' Not wanted in a newspaper office. Give me the man who can smell out facts. Imagination is as cheap as dirt and not so useful. It makes me tired! 'Took a second at Oxford.' I agree with Northcliffe. 'The Oxford manner is the most pernicious taint to a newspaper man.' You can hardly cure

it. "Sure he would make his mark on your paper." Oh yes, I dare say. There are too many marks on it at present. Some of them want rubbing out, and will if I have any india-rubber in my soul." He turned to Luttrell and smiled at him.

"I don't want to hurt your young feelings," he said, "but this is about the most damning testimonial you could have brought away with you. It is very characteristic of your friend Gibbs."

"I am sorry," said Luttrell, flushing hotly. "I rather hoped——"

He rose and took up his hat.

"Well, don't be in a deuce of a hurry," said Bellamy. "Sit down, and let's have some more of your great gifts."

The door opened with a bang, and a big man, with a big face that seemed made of the india-rubber which Bellamy had wished for his soul, came in without ceremony and strode over to the desk.

"Sorry to interrupt your strenuous labours, and all that don't-you-know-what, but there's the Home Secretary's secretary outside, and wants to see you on official business. My word! Oh dear, oh no!"

"Tell him to run away and boil his head," said Bellamy. "I'm busy. If the Prime Minister comes, I can't help it. I am up to my ears in work."

"Yes, I've noticed you do overwork yourself," said the newcomer, twisting his mouth, and giving a vast wink with one big eye to Luttrell. "Oh yes, we have to be very careful of our editor! Don't you know, what? Well! well!—what am I to tell him? After all, we *are* a Government paper. We must be civil to these official fools."

"I suppose it is about the Unemployed," said Bellamy. "Tell him to drive them into Trafalgar Square, and play the Gatling guns on 'em. It's the only remedy."

"All right," said the big man, taking a tremendous stride to the door.

Bellamy called him back, laughing.

"Seriously, Vicary, I can't be bothered. Put him on to Codrington, who loves gentlemen of state, and over-awes them with his Ranelagh-Gardens-Charles-Grandison style. Tell him to say that we are in deep sympathy with the Unemployed, and are determined that this question shall be settled, and that we have every desire to help the Government—and that sort of tosh—you know!"

Vicary shook an enormous fist at his Chief, and leered at him with big eyes.

"Oh, oh!" he said. "One of these days, when you put up for Parliament——"

He laughed, a rich chuckling laugh, and went out of the room.

"That's Vicary," said Bellamy; "that's the man that will make you like the toad under the harrow if I am weak enough to add to my salary list."

"I wonder if you will," said Luttrell, leaning forward with a feeble effort to restrain his eagerness. "I believe I could do good work for you. I have written a good many different kinds of articles and have had signed things in the *Spectator*, and so on—and I'm very keen."

"Did you say the *Spectator*?" said Bellamy, starting back with a mock air of fright. "That is where our leader-writers get their training; and that is why this paper has half the circulation it ought to have. I am afraid you are too serious, too wise, and too good for us, Mr. Luttrell, sir."

Luttrell laughed.

"I have written for the *Star*, the *Police Gazette*, and the *Domestic Servants' Weekly*," he said.

"Ah, now you're talking," said Bellamy. "If you've written for the *Police Gazette*, there's some hope for you.

Facts, Mr. Luttrell, that's what we want. Life, passion, drama, the human heart. That is what makes a newspaper circulation. When I was religious editor of the *Chicago Angel*——"

The door opened, and a man in a white apron came in with a bundle of long proofs which he put on the desk. "We're already five columns short of being over-set," he said.

Bellamy looked at him and a strange expression crept into his steel-blue eyes. He brought his hand down with a bang on to a gong on the desk. Before the ring of it had died away, a boy rushed in.

"Tell Mr. Swale to come here," said Bellamy.

He picked up his bayonet and weighed it in his hand.

An elderly man with grey hair, much ruffled, and a massive, clean-shaven face with dark bags under his eyes, came in rather hurriedly.

"Do you see this bayonet?" said Bellamy.

The elderly man put on his spectacles and looked at it.

"Yes," he said, with just the faintest flicker of a smile on his lips; "I've seen it before."

"Well, you'll feel it underneath your fifth rib," said Bellamy.

He sprang up from his chair with such real passion that the elderly man started back.

"My God! Swale," he said. "Hicks tells me that we're five columns short of being over-set, and it's only ten o'clock."

"Well, look at the state of things," said the elderly man. "There's the Unemployed riot at Manchester, the Suffrage raid on the House, the Colonial Secretary at Leeds——"

Bellamy dropped wearily into his chair again. "You make me tired," he said. "If there was an earthquake at Tooting Bec, and if all the animals at the Zoo broke

loose and dined off the population round Regent's Park, you can't get more than fifty-six columns in an eight-page paper. That's simple arithmetic."

The elderly man took a pinch of snuff with an air of unconcern, but his face was hotly flushed.

"I try to keep the stuff down as much as possible, but all your young gentlemen will overwrite themselves."

"Well, go away," said Bellamy. "We'll talk about this to-morrow when the proprietor comes up. This sort of thing can't go on, you know."

Mr. Swale's flush died down and left him with an unhealthy pallor. He hesitated for a moment and then walked out of the room. Bellamy jotted down a word or two in a notebook on his desk, and then lit a cigar, which he smoked in silence for a minute or two.

"Is there any scriptural authority for saying that Satan was a sub-editor?" he said presently.

Then he looked across at Luttrell. "Let's see," he said, "where were we?"

"You were saying that you thought of adding me to your salary list," said Luttrell audaciously.

Bellamy's eyes twinkled. "Did I go as far as that? Well, I don't mind giving you a trial. Is £4 10s. a week any good to you as descriptive reporter?"

"Yes," said Luttrell. "It will save me from starvation."

Bellamy's eyes softened.

"You have been having a bad time, haven't you?" he said in a kindly voice.

"Pretty tough," said Luttrell.

"I know, I know I have been through the mill myself. I know what it is to be a freelance tilting against iron walls."

He looked across the room, and his eyes were dreamy for a moment until a smile crept into them.

"I had the best of fun in the old days when I was an adventurer with an average income of twenty-five bob."

He put another word or two into his note-book, and said with a return to his bantering way—

"That's fixed then. You sell your soul and body to us for ninety shillings a week?"

"I hope you'll not regret the bargain," said Luttrell.

"Oh, I dare say I shall," said Bellamy. "Anyhow, I will give you my usual words of advice to those who join my staff. Make a note of them, won't you?"

Luttrell pulled out a pencil and took a loose sheet of paper.

"They are all 'dont's,'" said Bellamy. "Don't wear your hair long. Don't wear a bowler hat with a tail-coat. Don't say 'on a ship.' Don't use a foreign word when there is an English one in the dictionary. Don't have serious convictions on any subjects in the world."

He interpolated an explanation.

"There have been more pressmen ruined by serious convictions than by drink. I have two men at present suffering from that disease. Between ourselves, I have sentenced them both to death. One is a young gentleman who once did a Cook's tour in Belgium and has Belgium on the brain. He will drag it in if he is writing a leading article on Woman's Suffrage, or Tariff Reform. Another man once went to tea with a Russian anarchist and was filled with serious convictions on Russian freedom. Consequently we ignore Paris, Berlin and Vienna, and devote ourselves to the interests of Jewish cut-throats and Russian murderers in Moscow and St. Petersburg."

He paused and looked sharply at Luttrell.

"Are there any more don'ts?" said the young man.

"Yes," said Bellamy. "Don't have any political

opinions. A pressman must write from a brief, not from his soul."

He rose and shook hands with the new member of his staff.

"You can start work to-morrow if you like. Go and see Vicary. I will tell him I have taken you on. Before a week's out he will teach you the deepest significance of hell on earth."

Luttrell thanked him, warmly and eagerly, but Bellamy touched his gong and a boy came in.

"Next man," said Bellamy.

As Luttrell was going out Bellamy called him back for a moment.

"Have you heard the story about the Rector's daughter?" he said, laughing softly to himself.

"No," said Luttrell, smiling; "what is it?"

"Well, if you are tempted to hear something very wicked and very witty you ask Quin to tell you. He's inimitable. . . . Good-night."

Francis Luttrell went out of the building which was humming with a strange, throbbing, booming sound as though a million bees were swarming, and turning into Fleet Street stood under a lamp-post, staring across the roadway with a peculiar light in his eyes.

"Thank Heaven!" he said aloud, "my luck has turned at last."

CHAPTER II

FRANCIS LUTTRELL was rather typical of the "only son." I had known him first as a shy, good-looking boy in a country vicarage where he was the idol of his mother and father, who tried very hard, but quite vainly, to hide their idolatry from him. His father, the Rector of High Stanton, was a thoughtful, literary man, with what used to be called "high ideals"—it is an old-fashioned phrase now—and a broad humanitarianism. But he was unpopular in his living, because he had a touch of mysticism which made him an enigma to the small shop-keepers and middle-class gentry of the little country town. They mistook his reserved nature, absent-mindedness and intellectual culture for pride. The truth is that the man was far above the level of the people among whom he lived, and it was a real torture to him to be impelled day by day and year by year to bring himself down to their small ideas, and to limit his vision to the narrow outlook of his parish. Yet, far from being proud, he had a deep humility of spirit, and he rebuked himself constantly for what he knew was his failure to gain the confidence and affection of his people. His sensitive spirit shrank from the bickerings and scandals and gossip-mongering of the men and women who came to criticise as well as to pray in his church, and after repeated episodes, in which he blundered badly in his efforts for peace and good-will, he shrank farther into his shell, and devoted more hours a day to the study of Greek literature and archæology.

Young Frank Luttrell was the heir to his father's sen-

sitive and shy nature, although underneath that shyness he had the gay imagination and the desire for companionship which belonged to his mother, who had faced a life of drudgery and small duties among commonplace folk with a sunny courage, which only in secret was sometimes dissolved in the mist of tears. From his babyhood they had sheltered their boy from the rough world. His father, remembering with horror his own life at a public school where he had been miserable among boys of a coarse fibre, determined to save Francis from that hard experience, and became the boy's tutor after the early years when the mother had him all to herself. As regards mere knowledge Francis was not at a disadvantage with other boys of his own age. Indeed, thrown upon his own resources a good deal, he developed a taste for literature and languages, and revelled in the English and French classics when most boys direct their enthusiasm to football and cricket. Otherwise he was severely handicapped. He had a warm and intimate friendship with one lad, the son of a neighbouring clergyman, but apart from that he led a lonely, self-absorbed life. But for his mother's bright and practical nature he would have become inevitably morbid and neurotic. As it was at the age of sixteen years he had acquired the rather dangerous habit of taking long solitary walks, with a book of poetry or a French play in his pocket. His imagination was overstimulated by these wanderings in the woods on summer days, and there were times when even his father had misgivings and rather dreadful doubts as to whether he had done the right thing by his son. Between those two there was a friendship of rare tenderness, but veiled by the reserve which was natural to both of them. If they had not been so shy Francis would have told his father many of the things which stirred in his heart, and the clergyman would have talked

more freely and candidly upon the troubles and temptations of life. Avoiding all words of this kind they discussed the humour of Molière, and the wisdom of Dr. Johnson, and the characteristics of other great masters, and Francis never lost his reverence for the wise scholarship, the fine taste, and the prodigious memory of his father.

It was to his mother, Constantia Fielding, that Francis revealed himself as much as any boy will—and most boys are in hiding from those they love. It was the mother who first guessed that at seventeen years of age Frank was becoming moody, wretchedly discontented, and possessed with a passionate desire for a larger experience of life and emotion. The blackest hour of the little woman's life was on a day when the carpenter's wife came to her with the tale that the "Young Master" had got her daughter into trouble. For a moment Mrs. Luttrell's heart stood still and the world seemed to crumble under her feet. Afterwards it appeared that no great harm was done, and that Frank had only hurt little Susan Budge by kissing her too often in shady lanes on summer evenings. Frank himself admitted his fault with a burst of nervous laughter, and confessed that he had made a fool of himself with the girl, who boasted of his kisses to other lovers of her own class. But it was a grave warning to Mr. and Mrs. Luttrell and they did not neglect it. Frank was sent off to a coach at Maidenhead after some solemn and tender words by his father, and melted by the sight of his mother's tears. But he had the promise of three years at Oxford, and his heart jumped at the thought of the great adventure of life into which he was now to plunge.

He went to Oxford in his nineteenth year and was entered at Balliol, where his father had been before him. As a "fresher" he was not a success. Not having been

to a public school he had no ready-made friends, and was in danger of living a hermit's life in his rooms. He was not good at games, and was put down as a "mug" who would do no credit to his college. Frank himself cursed his thin skin, his early training, and his utter lack of all the qualities of good friendship. He had a great yearning to show the men that he was not such a fool as they thought him, that he had a game and gay spirit and was out for devilry. He began to have a loathing for all books except those which would teach him "life." He read Rabelais, and pretended to himself that the Rabelaisian philosophy was greater than the teaching of the prophets. He flung overboard his rather mystical idealism which he had received from his father and all the shining dream-figures of that world in which he had wandered in his lonely boyhood. To the astonishment of all Balliol men he distinguished himself one night as the most reckless and daring leader of a gown and town riot, in which there was a serious fray with the police. Frank Luttrell, who was both drunk and disorderly, bashed in a policeman's helmet, gave a bloody nose to the wearer thereof, and after a night in the cells was brought up before a magistrate and fined five pounds. He narrowly escaped being sent down, but received an ovation from a number of men who, to his great joy, invaded his rooms for the first time, drank wine with him, smoked his cigarettes and slapped him on the back as a good fellow. The report of that night's work came to the rectory at High Stanton as a bombshell. To Mr. and Mrs. Luttrell it was incredible that their son should have been the ringleader of a disgraceful riot. To their minds, remembering his quiet and sensitive nature, his refined and pure spirit, his shrinking from all coarseness and brutality, it would not have been more unthinkable if he had been charged with murder. It was clear

to them that this was a case of mistaken identity, and that Frank was the victim of some dreadful error of justice. Mrs. Luttrell, indeed, believed that he had sacrificed himself to shield a friend. Then they received a letter from him written exultantly, describing the night's scene with a wild enthusiasm and glorying in his own achievement. "At last," he said, "I have tasted the wine of life, and it is very good." To the clergyman and his wife that letter was the breaking-up of all the belief in the gospel of "home-influence," and they had to grope their way blindly to a new philosophy into which their son's new character could be fitted. After the first shock the mother understood the meaning of Frank's outbreak more clearly than her husband. She also, in younger days, had been tempted to "break out," to scandalise her little world by some unconventional adventure which would relieve the continual monotony, the deadly respectability of her existence as a clergyman's wife in a small town. These had been secret promptings hidden even to her husband, and alarming to herself. But now they came back to her as an excuse for Frank; and when a card-board box arrived with a much mutilated policeman's helmet inside, sent by Frank as a trophy of a "glorious night," she cried and laughed hysterically, wetting that ludicrous object with her tears.

Frank's breach of the law was only a spasmodic adventure, and afterwards he nearly lost his new popularity by shrinking again behind his cloak of reserve. But he won a position for himself in his second year by a contribution to a new Oxford magazine, very daring in its satire of men and manners. Frank discovered that he held a pen which had the gift of epigram and caricature. He wrote a series of pen-portraits which were welcomed by Dons and undergraduates as something new and striking. For some time the secret of their author-

ship was not divulged, but when they were traced to Frank Luttrell there was general astonishment that a fellow of his temperament should have such quick observation of personal idiosyncracies, and such a light-hearted wit. Another surprise was given when it became known that Luttrell was the author also of a number of serious little studies in the magazine which revealed a very intimate and rather mystical understanding of nature. Luttrell's dual characteristics were revealed to some extent by these two styles of writing. The gaiety of his pen-portraits showed that in spite of a kind of timidity of manner among his fellows, he had the keenest of eyes for the little traits which go to form a personality, while his nature sketches came from a spirit which had listened in loneliness to the whispers of the nature world, and had been filled at times with the Dionysian ecstasy.

In spite of these successes Frank's career at Oxford disappointed his father, who had been his early tutor. He came down with a second-class, and was depressed and dissatisfied with himself.

"What are you going to do, Frank?" said his father in the study, which smelt of stale tobacco and damp books. "The Church, I suppose?"

"No," said Frank; "anything but that, anything in the world."

The clergyman raised his eyebrows and then smiled rather sadly at his son.

"You have been prejudiced by my failure," he said. "But for many men the Church is a good career. It gives an opportunity of useful work; a man is able to live up to his ideals, as far as the weakness of the flesh and spirit will allow. He has a good deal of leisure for study, and it is still the position of a gentleman. Why not take

orders, Frank? As a poor man I cannot help you to one of the other professions."

"There are three reasons against it," said Frank. "One, I have no vocation. Two, I detest religious ladies, scandal-loving ladies and old ladies who wear red flannel underclothes. Three, I could never survive the ordeal of looking and feeling such an obvious fool as a curate."

"Well, that settles it," said his father, laughing. "What are you going to be then, Frank?"

"God knows," said Frank very gloomily.

Before the year was out I knew also. Frank Luttrell became second-master at the Abbey School, King's Marshwood. I spent a week-end with him here after he had been at the place a year. He had comfortable rooms in the charming old schoolhouse looking on to the Abbey Gardens, and, beyond a clump of noble beeches, to the Abbey itself, grey, solemn, beautiful, and very restful to a man from Fleet Street. As we sat smoking in his room, panelled and furnished in dark oak, with bookshelves round the walls laden with French and English classics and with some good prints after Raphael and the Italian Masters to give colour to the room, the Abbey clock chimed out, with deep-toned notes that lingered on the ear, in sweet and solemn cadence.

"I envy you, Frank," I said. "The music of those old bells must creep into your soul. The atmosphere of this place would give peace to the most feverish heart. Time itself goes slowly here." He looked across at me and laughed a little impatiently.

"Yes, each quarter of an hour is an hour, each hour is a day. Oh," he said, with a strange note of suppressed passion, "I sometimes curse that old clock."

I looked at him as he sat leaning forward on a wooden settle with his pipe in his hand. His boyish, clean-shaven face and his long hands were beautifully bronzed. In his

soft white shirt, flannel suit and tennis shoes, he looked a handsome, healthy fellow, the typical Oxford man, with the refined face, the easy, athletic pose, the reserve and quietude which belong to many men of his age and class and training. But there was something in his bluish-grey eyes which made me feel a little uneasy about him. It was a kind of wistfulness, which, when he spoke the last words, changed for a moment to an expression of suppressed revolt.

"You have a good time here," I said. "Pleasant work, short hours, long holidays. What more do you want?"

He got up from his chair and went over to the window, an old-fashioned mullioned window, with little bulging panes, and looked out to the Abbey Gardens.

"I want life," he said presently, in a low voice.

"Isn't this life?" I answered after a few whiffs of one of his cigarettes.

"A sleeping life," he said. "I want to keep awake, I want to see things, to do things, to get in touch with modernity. This old town is three centuries away from modern life."

"Yes," I said. "How jolly!"

He laughed nervously, and sat down with his legs stretched out and his chin on his chest.

"Awfully jolly!" he said, with sarcasm. "You have no idea how jolly it is for a fellow of my age and temperament to have no other society but the stupid boys and doddering old clergyman schoolmaster, his thin-lipped, bad-tempered wife, three assistants without an idea between them, tennis girls who don't even know how to flirt, and occasionally, as a wild excitement, an ecclesiastical tea-party at the Abbey House."

"My dear fellow," I said, "you have your books, your pipes, fresh air and exercise, and a beautiful environment. Also I have not the slightest doubt that you could

teach one of those tennis girls to flirt in a quite delightful way. They only want a little encouragement."

"They won't get it from me," he said savagely. That evening he threw over some copies of the *Spectator* to me, and said in a casual way, "If you have nothing better to do, you might glance at those essays on the dog-eared pages. I should be glad of your candid opinion."

"Oh, ho," I said, "yours, eh? I suppose you mean you want my cordial praise."

"No, I don't; if they are rotten, say so."

I spent an hour over them. The essays were quite good, with the Oxford touch a little too apparent, but with a very pleasant humour, with now and again a phrase that flashed at one, and here and there a note of mysticism and ecstasy which brought back to my mind his Oxford sketches on nature.

"Not bad," I said at last. "Not at all bad, Frank."

He coloured up with pleasure.

"Honest Injun?" he asked.

"Yes, no codding. You have got a rather pretty touch. Stick to it, and you will get many a nice little guinea as pocket-money."

He sat smoking—he smoked a great deal too much—while I read another *Spectator* article.

Then he bent forward and said with a little quiver in his voice:

"Look here, do you think I should stand any chance in London—as a freelance?"

"Free what?" I said.

He gave me a steady look out of his grey eyes.

"You know what I mean," he said quietly. "I mean do you think I could pick up a living in town with this sort of stuff?"

"No, I don't," I said, without the slightest hesitation.

He smiled.

"Well, anyhow I am going to try."

"My dear Frank," I said rather heatedly, "for Heaven's sake don't make a fool of yourself. Don't get that stupid notion into your head that a decent livelihood is to be got nowadays by what people are pleased to call a literary career."

"Some people earn their living that way," said Frank; "you, for instance."

"No, I don't," I said. "I am a journalist and newspaper reporter, that is to say, a miserable wretch who has sold his body and soul to Fleet Street."

"You've written books," said Frank.

I laughed. My friend Frank was very, very young.

"Oh yes, I have written books of a kind," I said. "They have never paid for my washing bills. That is why I went back to Fleet Street. In this life it is necessary to pay one's washerwoman."

"Je n'en vois pas la nécessité," said Frank with a sudden flash of humour. Then he added, "After all, as you say, there is always Fleet Street."

I looked at him squarely.

"Not for you, Frank. There is not an editor in Fleet Street who would give you a billet, at least not on my recommendation. You have not roughed it enough. You are a sensitive plant. Fleet Street would kill you in a year, it is very cruel, very callous to the sufferings of men's souls and bodies. Besides, journalism is an overcrowded profession. There is not a vacancy in any office that I know."

"I suppose not," said Frank quietly; "but Fleet Street is not my goal. I would rather keep my liberty and be my own master."

I think I was rather angry and brutal with him. The calm assurance of the youth annoyed me. And his absolute ignorance of all the misery that lay in front of him

if he overtempted Providence in the way he desired, gave me a kind of dismay. I thought Frank was too delicate a soul to be bespattered in the squalor of Fleet Street. I pointed out to him that the profession of letters has been invaded by the amateur; that every barrister without a brief, every curate with a little leisure, every elementary schoolmaster, every modern lady with or without a past, every soldier who has fought through a campaign, every man with a long memory and every boy with a touch of imagination, is writing short stories, autobiographies or "special articles" for the magazines and newspapers.

"The professional man of letters," I said, "is becoming starved out. The only people who make money, with a few exceptions, are novelists who, by some strange fluke which cannot be accounted for, or worked out on any system, make a big popular hit."

Frank listened to me with polite attention for quite an hour, and then, getting up, stretched his arms and yawned.

"I am sorry you take such a gloomy view of things," he said. "Let's go to bed. Shall we?"

A month later I received a postcard from Frank Luttrell. It was addressed from Staple Inn. "Come and cheer me up with some of your pessimism," it said.

So the young dog had come to London.

I went round to Staple Inn the next afternoon. The sun of a glorious autumn day was on the front of the old wooden houses in Holborn which remain in the hideous highway as a relic of picturesque London; and in the little court the leaves were brown on the few trees, and red where they lay rotting on the ground. I climbed up the narrow spiral staircase, the walls of which had been rubbed by many shoulders now gone to dust, by many

generations of young barristers, by many poor devils who have kept a plucky heart, or hidden a heavy one.

On the top landing I saw a visiting-card tacked on to a little old door. "Mr. Frank Luttrell." I gave a bang on the knocker and heard a long stride coming across the floor inside. Then the door opened and Luttrell stood grinning at me, his handsome, boyish face not so bronzed as when I had last seen him.

"Tea's jist ready," he said. "Mind your head!"

I ducked under the oak beam and went inside, into a small, low-ceilinged room with wooden panels, and an iron-work lattice window looking on to Holborn. "Very pretty," I said. "Very quaint. How much does it cost you?"

"One quid a week," said Frank, "with a few extras. Expensive, but it's worth it. . . . Look here!"

He opened the window and put his head out. The roar of the traffic came up from below, and standing by Frank's side I looked down into the street which was filled with the golden glamour of an autumn sunset. An endless stream of omnibuses, motor-cars, hansom-cabs, and hurrying people went by in a great tide of traffic, and seen from above through the golden haze the moving picture had a strange effect on one's senses.

"Ah! That's the real thing," said Frank, poking his head in, with a deep breath. "I never get tired of staring at it."

"I hope you are able to pay for it," I said, looking round the room again. "It's an expensive luxury."

"I have kept my end up pretty well, so far," said Frank, with an optimism in which I detected a note of insincerity. I found out that he had been there four weeks, and that during that time he had had three articles accepted which brought him in six guineas.

"That's one pound ten a week," I said, "and you pay

a pound a week for rent. It's rather out of proportion, isn't it? What about your food, and washing and clothes?"

"Oh, that's all right," said Frank jauntily. "I brought away a good stock of clothes and thirty pounds in good hard cash."

"But, my dear good fool," I cried, "a wardrobe and thirty pounds won't last for ever. What are you going to do afterwards? What *are* you going to do?"

"Have some tea," said Frank. "It's Lipton's best."

I swallowed my wrath and some of his tea which he had made with condensed milk. Then I pointed to the photographs of his father and mother on the mantelpiece.

"What do they think of it?"

"Oh, they take it quite sensibly," said Frank. "I have been sending them good accounts of myself."

"Well, you must have told them pretty stiff lies," I said.

He flushed a little, and gave me one of his straight looks.

"You haven't come here to quarrel, have you?" he said.

"No," I answered. Then I put my hand on his arm. "But I'm sorry that you have done this, Frank. You have no notion how sorry I am, I have seen too many tragedies of this kind."

"Oh, rot," he said impatiently, and then begged my pardon. "I am going to pick up a living somehow. I haven't started so badly."

"Three articles in four weeks, Frank!"

"Well, I have written heaps more. Some of them are bound to find a place."

He pointed to a big card hanging from a tack on the wall. It was a list of titles for articles, some of them ticked off in blue pencil.

"I have done a dozen of those," he said, "and the others are in my head. How do you fancy the titles?"

Some of them were rather striking and good, but as I told him, the title of an unwritten article was as unsubstantial as the dream of a good dinner.

I knew I was a wet blanket, and I blamed myself afterwards for damping down a boyish courage and enthusiasm which after all were worth more than any weary wisdom. Unfortunately I was unable to give him a helping hand, as I was ordered off on a special mission which took me away from London for six months. When I came back I called on him again.

He was looking thinner, and I thought his eyes had a rather feverish light in them.

"How goes it?" I said.

"Quite all right," he answered jauntily, and then seeing that I was looking at him rather searchingly, he coloured up, laughed in his low, nervous way, and said: "It's no use lying. Things are pretty bad. I shall have to clear out of these rooms. When you came I thought it was the landlord. He has been worrying for his rent."

"Are you so low as that?" I asked.

He put his hand in his pocket, and pulling out half-a-crown spun it up in the air and caught it in the palm of his hand.

"That's all I have until I can get a cheque for an article which was accepted a fortnight ago but is still unpublished." I whistled.

"How about the £30?" I asked.

"Oh, that's gone," he said; "I have been living on capital—and I swallowed up half of it when I put these sticks in. I just had enough left to do the theatres and run down home for week-ends."

"Theatres and week-ends in the country!" I said, laughing. "Surely bread-and-butter comes first."

"Oh, I don't know," said Frank. He stared into the fireplace where there were only cold ashes. Then, after a silence, he said gloomily, "I find London a hideously lonely place. At first I was excited by the noise and sights of the streets. I thought I should never tire of studying the faces in the crowds. Every face had a story to tell. I found a comedy or a tragedy at every street corner. But after all you can't be only a spectator. I hardly know a soul in London. Across the passage there is a newly-married couple, an artist fellow with a Russian Jewess as pretty as Ruth or Naomi. I can hear them laughing and quarrelling, and I pass them on the stairs, but I'm so stupidly nervous I can't say good-morning to them. Yet sometimes I would give a lot to go and have tea in their room, to talk to them—to talk to anybody. One gets so horribly tired of oneself."

"My poor Frank!" I said, not with any sarcasm or unkindness, I think. "And so you spent your last money in flying away from London, into the quiet country which you used to find so dull!"

He flushed, but lifted his head rather proudly.

"Oh," he said, "I don't regret having taken the plunge. I would not go back to the Abbey School for all the money in the world."

"And yet," I said, looking at the lonely half-crown on the table, "that is all you have, eh?"

He laughed, but it was not a cheery laugh.

"I have this," he said, pulling out a gold watch; "I suppose I can get something for it, although I have put off realising it as far as possible—it belonged to my old governor."

"Put that in your pocket," I said rather roughly, "I am not such a mean skunk, I hope."

However, when I offered to lend him a little money he turned very red and said "Damn!" and wouldn't touch

it, and then to my dismay went quite faint, so that I had to hold him.

"Good lord! man," I said. "What's the matter? If a friend can't lend another——"

"It's not that," he said, wiping off the cold sweat from his forehead. "I have been sucking an empty pipe on an empty stomach—sometimes it makes one forget dinner-time."

He begged my pardon a dozen times for making such a weak fool of himself, and was exceedingly distressed at having revealed himself in this way. But I was more distressed at the conditions into which he had fallen, and I took him off then and there to a cosy little restaurant in Soho where we had a good dinner and a bottle of wine, which made the world seem more rosy.

Over our cigarettes I asked him what I could do to give him a leg-up.

He crumbled his bread nervously, and then in a hesitating way said, "Look here, old chap, don't you think you could get a place for me in Fleet Street. I am not such a soft thing as you imagine. I believe I could shape into a journalist."

"You have had no experience," I said. "That's the devil of it. London pressmen have generally been to school on provincial papers."

I saw that my answer had plunged him into gloom again.

"I know," he said, "I am a useless creature. I suppose I shall be among the failures of life. Probably I shall drift into a city clerkship."

I thought things over, and then it struck me that Silas Bellamy might stretch a point in his favour. Bellamy was a generous-hearted little man with a gift of humour and with a warm corner in his heart for young men.

That evening I took Frank Luttrell to my club and

wrote a letter of introduction for him. The result of his interview has been described already. Frank came to me a day or two later excited and full of gratitude, laughing but with something like a sob in his throat. "Four pound ten a week!" he said. "I shall do like a duke on that." Then he gave me the details of his interview with a real sense of humour.

CHAPTER III

FRANK LUTTRELL began the first day of his new career like a shipwrecked mariner who had floated ashore at the last gasp. Relieved of the haunting anxiety of keeping body and soul together by writing imaginative essays which were rejected four times out of five, and with a regular salary on a great London newspaper, it seemed to him that he had reached a land of promise. Yet in spite of his soaring spirit he could not overcome a feeling of intense nervousness and excitement. He came as a stranger to Fleet Street, ignorant of the technicalities of journalism and of social etiquette and customs of newspaper life. Always diffident in the company of his fellow-creatures, yet boyishly anxious to make a good impression, he looked forward not without a flutter at the heart to his first plunge into a new and strange society.

He was disconcerted a little at the outset. Passing through the swing doors of the office with a quick step, he went upstairs and said: "Good-morning——" to the man named Leach who sat at the desk on the landing with the six messenger boys who were again eating toffee and again reading small books with flaming covers. He was about to go down the corridor to find his way to the reporters' room when the man sprang up and interrupted him in an aggressive way.

"No," he said, "excuse me! Not even a Harchangel goes by 'ere without the Heditor's consent. Kindly fill up a form signifying name and business, if *you* please."

"It's all right, my good fellow," said Luttrell, inclined to be angry. "I'm on the staff."

"Oh, are you?" said Leach, as though he had his doubts. "'Ow am I to know that, I wonder?"

"Because I tell you so," said Luttrell, with a touch of his Oxford manner.

"Oh, well, of course," said the man, changing his tone. "I'm bound to take your word for it." He seemed to have a grievance. "The Chief should have let me know. 'Ow am I to do my dooty to this office if I am confronted by strange gentlemen what may have no more right than the devil to get inside these premises. I ask you, is it reasonable?"

"May I venture to ask who *you* are?" said Luttrell, smiling, in spite of his annoyance at this peculiar Cockney person who seemed to think that he had a position of great authority. The man turned to one of the boys.

"Jenkins," he said, "tell the gentleman who I am."

The boy grinned. "Serjeant Leach, sir, V. C., clerk-in-charge."

"I'm pleased to meet you, Serjeant Leach," said Luttrell, holding out his hand. He was determined not to make an enemy at the outset whoever he might be.

"All on my side," said Leach, with magnanimity, shaking his hand. "As you may not be aware, sir, the clerk-in-charge is a responsible orgin in a newspaper office, being entrusted with many secrets, both private and confidential, which are not to be betrayed for gold, nor even for the price of a drink in 'ot weather. Modesty forbids me to enumerate my other duties which range from the temporary haccommodation of gentlemen who anticipate their weekly wage to the more 'eroic task of summoning up spirits from the vasty deep after the club is closed." Luttrell was conscious that he had come in contact with a humourist, and he made the immediate resolution to avoid him strenuously. The man's familiarity was somewhat galling to his sense of dignity.

"You certainly have a great variety of duties," he said. "Where shall I find the reporters' room?"

"You can smell it," said Serjeant Leach. "Most of the young gentlemen in'ale them threepenny packets of poison-sticks. A 'orrible 'abit, I call it. 'Smoke a good honest pipe and thou shalt stand before Kings,' as Shakespeare said. First room on the left."

"Thanks," said Luttrell.

He went down the passage and stood for a moment outside the door pointed out to him. He could hear the sound of voices and a girl's laugh. For a moment his heart beat rather quickly. He drew a deep breath. Then he opened the door and went in—crossing the threshold of a new life.

It was a large room with a number of desks divided by glass partitions, and with a large table in the centre. At the far end of the room was a fire burning brightly in the grate and in front of it were two men and a girl, the men in swing chairs with their legs stretched out, the girl on the floor in the billows of a black silk skirt, arranging chestnuts on the first bar of the grate.

Luttrell recognised the group. One was the excessively tall young man with the pale gold hair, the handsome white face, and the tired, lack-lustre eyes. Mr. Christopher Codrington, he had been called, if Luttrell's memory did not err. The girl was one whose laughter he had heard in Bellamy's room and who was going to the Gala night at the Opera. And he recognised the dapper man with the black moustache and the whimsical face who had been telling a funny story up and down the passage.

"My dear girl," said the tall young man, "why will you risk soiling those little white hands of yours by such dirty work? Surely the mere animal pleasure of eating chestnuts——"

The girl seized a roasted chestnut which popped out of the fire, and stripping it of its skin gave it to the little man with the black moustache.

"It makes my mouth water," she said, "but I sometimes try to exercise self-restraint. . . . Oh, eat it quickly, Mr. Quin, or I shall take it back!"

Then she clasped her hands round one of her knees and looked at the tall young man with a flush on her face that may have been caused by the fire.

"I wonder if you have ever made *your* hands dirty, Mr. Christopher Codrington?" she said, with her head a little on one side, looking at him with an air of serious inquiry.

"I always try to keep them clean," said Codrington, studying his manicured nails with satisfaction. "Have you any objection?"

"I dislike men to be always clean," said the girl, whose name Luttrell afterwards learnt to be Katherine Halstead. "It is a sign of decadence."

The tall young man opened his bluish-grey eyes with surprise. "I protest," he said. "Quin, I appeal to you. Do you discern any sign of decadence in me?"

"Yes," said Quin; "you are damnably decadent all over, from your golden hair to your effeminate feet."

Codrington rose to his great height and putting his thumbs into his armholes assumed a parliamentary air and attitude. "I must ask the honourable member to withdraw her offensive statement," he said severely.

"I will withdraw it," said Miss Katherine, munching a chestnut, "if you can swear to me that you have ever blacked your own boots."

"I will swear," said Codrington solemnly, "that I once blacked a man's eye. It was on behalf of a lady in distress, who afterwards scratched my face for interfering."

The girl laughed, and threw one of her roasted chestnuts at him, which he just dodged in time.

"Bravo!" cried Quin. "Though we disbelieve the fact, it is a pretty tale."

Then suddenly all three of them saw Frank Luttrell, who was standing by the door.

"I spy strangers," said Mr. Quin, in a low voice.

The girl rose from the floor with a momentary sign of confusion, and Codrington, in his suave, polished way, said, "Are you looking for anybody, sir?"

Luttrell stepped forward blushing like a school-boy discovered with a crib. "I am sorry to intrude," he said nervously, "but the fact is—er—I am on the staff. My name's Frank Luttrell."

"Oh!" said all of them simultaneously.

Mr. Quin laughed and said: "That was pretty good for an unrehearsed chorus! . . . Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Luttrell. Join us, won't you, and share the merry chestnuts? You have no idea what a quantity we get through in this office. Many of them find their way into the *Rag*. Our friend Codrington there is a great merchant of them."

Frank Luttrell was looking towards the girl, and their eyes met and lingered in each other for a moment. He thought she looked more attractive to-day than on the first night he had seen her. The fire had touched her cheeks, and the rather pretty confusion with which she sprang from the floor, concealing the roasting chestnuts with her skirts, struck his imagination as an attitude which would have been delightful to a French impressionist. She dropped her eyes with a slight movement and a little laugh. "Yes, do. . . . They are done to a turn . . . and there is an empty chair there."

"Thanks," said Luttrell, "if I am not really intruding."

"Intruding, my dear fellow," said Quin; "you are one of us, aren't you?"

Luttrell took the vacant chair, and the girl put a thing like a cinder into his hands.

"There's a beauty for you!" she said.

Luttrell still felt a little embarrassed. The girl was kneeling on the floor again and the tips of her fingers touched his hand for a moment as she gave him the charred nut. It seemed good to him that in a moment he should have got on to the fireside as it were of journalistic life, that the pretty girl by his side should treat him with friendly familiarity, and that Quin should call him "one of us." Frank had lived some months in loneliness, and this sudden warmth of companionship melted him.

Christopher Codrington's pale eyes were studying Luttrell's clothes. They were of Harris tweed and well cut though somewhat the worse for wear, but Luttrell noticed the fixed gaze upon him and shifted his position to hide the frayed edges of his trousers, a movement that did not escape Codrington, whose lips curled with the faint flicker of a smile.

"Are you on the news side of the *Rag*?" said Codrington.

"Yes," said Frank. "At least I suppose so, I am rather ignorant of the organisation of a newspaper as I have never been on one before."

"Marry come up!" said Codrington, lifting his light gold eyebrows. "You amaze me. Is it too late for you to draw back?"

"Draw back," said Luttrell. "Why?"

"My dear fellow!" said Codrington solemnly; "there is a dreadful text over this doorway: 'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.' Please, please, if you have a mother who loves you, if you have a kind, forgiving father, go back to that happy home ere it is yet too late."

"Don't pay any attention to him, Mr. Luttrell," said the girl. "Because he is making a wreck of his own career, he imagines that no one is strong enough to survive the ordeals of journalism."

"Miss Katherine," said Codrington, raising his long white hand in protest, "do not be so cruel in your candour."

Quin, the little man with the black moustache, broke out into song, in a rather pleasant baritone—

*"Be she mee-ker, kind-er than
Turtle dove or peli-can,
If she be not so to me
What care I how kind she be?"*

There was the tinkle of a telephone bell.

"Hello! Hello! Yes, Mr. Quin is here. At your service, Mr. Vicary, sir. . . . Get a special interview with Maudie Merivale about the rumour of her marriage with Lord Mersham? Certainly . . . nothing easier. And a portrait? Oh yes, dozens. In every kind of costume, and otherwise."

He put down the receiver and said "Damn" softly.

"The Press has become nothing but an advertising agency for chorus girls," he said.

"Maudie Merivale?" said Codrington, sitting up. "What, has she done it too? I used to know her when she did the splits at the Britannia. A saucy little thing who was born in a travelling circus, and learnt her first tricks on Epsom Downs."

"Oh yes, *you* know her, of course," said Quin. "No doubt she will invite you to tea when she gives her first At-Home at Mersham Castle."

"It's not the first time I have had tea with her," said Codrington, stroking his chin.

"Thank you," said Katherine Halstead severely; "we don't want any more revelations of your private life."

Quin lifted his hat to the girl with exaggerated grace. "Fair lady," he said, "my heart is sad at this parting. Perchance, however, we shall meet again."

He lifted up the tails of his black coat and pirouetted like a *première danseuse* to the door, kissing his hand, as he poised on one toe, before disappearing.

Luttrell laughed.

"What part does Mr. Quin play in this world's stage?" he asked.

"Dramatic critic and theatrical gossip-monger," said Codrington. "He has seen every play for the last fifteen years, knows every actor in the country, and hates the profession like poison. I think that is very wrong of him."

"He is one of the dearest and best," said Katherine Halstead. "Quite the favourite, I hear, with all the barmaids in the West End. I think Mr. Codrington is envious of him. There seems to be an irresistible fascination about barmaids."

Codrington looked at the girl with his pale eyes, in which there was a curious smile.

"I wonder!" he said, "I wonder!"

There was another tinkle at the telephone-bell which Codrington answered leisurely.

"Are you there? . . . yes, this is he. The Duchess of Porchester's Charity Bazaar? Opens at twelve? Not more than two sticks? Oh, that is hardly enough, surely? . . . Certainly, Mr. Vicary. Oh no, the dear duchess is always very kind. What! Ha! ha! Naughty! naughty!"

He hung up the telephone and laughed quietly.

"What a man! . . . What a life!"

He bent over Katherine, who had gone to one of the desks and was tearing up strips of paper and throwing them into a little wicker basket.

"Are you busy to-day?" he said in a low voice.

"Very busy," she answered.

"You are vexed with me. You have been very cruel for quite a week. What have I done?"

She got up quickly, shrugging her shoulders, and went over to the telephone, asking for a number.

Codrington looked at her with an exaggerated air of melancholy, heaved a long-drawn sigh, and then, with a quiet "Good-morning" to Luttrell, went out of the room.

Katherine was calling down the telephone—

"Is that the W.F.L.? . . . Oh yes. What time do you begin operations to-night? Seven o'clock. Oh thanks. A hot time, eh? Well done! I shall be there. Well, good luck and good-bye."

Luttrell was left alone with the girl, and he crossed the room and took a seat at one of the vacant desks. He felt that he ought to go upstairs and report himself to his news-editor, but he was seized with an absurd kind of shyness and could not muster up courage to face that big man with the big eyes to whom Bellamy had introduced him a few nights ago.

He glanced towards the girl and saw that she was looking at him.

"I shouldn't take that chair if I were you," she said.

"No," said Luttrell, getting up rather hurriedly. "Why not?"

"It's a dead man's chair. I don't know whether you are superstitious about those things; I am."

"Perhaps it is rather an ill-omen," said Luttrell. "Who was he?"

"It was young Frampton . . . an awfully nice boy. He was not strong enough for this kind of life. He got wet through at a shipwreck on the Cornish coast, where he was sent off suddenly one evening without his dinner and without his overcoat. I called it murder. The others

call it martyrdom. The name doesn't count much. The poor boy's dead, anyhow."

"But if you can stand this life, surely a man can," said Luttrell.

"Oh, I don't know," said the girl. "It's a question of luck, I suppose, and the men get the roughest time."

"I am glad of that," said Luttrell earnestly. "Awfully glad."

Katherine Halstead laughed as she put on a white fur hat and boa, in which she seemed pretty and dainty to Luttrell's eyes, which lingered on her.

"That's nice of you. Still, we women wear out sooner. Five years in Fleet Street withers any girl. Then she gets crowsfeet round her eyes and becomes snappy and fretful or a fierce creature struggling in an unequal combat with men. I am just reaching that stage."

"Oh no," said Luttrell eagerly. "I am quite sure that you are not."

"I think I know best about that." Katherine Halstead smiled at him and then looked at him rather curiously.

"You are quite new to Fleet Street, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Luttrell; "I have only been a few months in London, and then I lived alone in lodgings. I am an awful greenhorn. Before that I taught in a country school."

"I *thought* you came from the country," said the girl, getting some papers together and putting them into a handbag. "You have got green fields in your eyes. I should think you write fairy-tales, don't you, and make them all end happily ever after?"

"You mean to say that I am very young," said Frank, colouring up.

"I should say you are not a hundred and fifty years old like most of us here," said Miss Halstead, buttoning up a long glove, but giving him a swift little glance in which

there was a glint of mischief. "You have no idea what old men and women there are in Fleet Street. They have worn out all emotion. They have seen everything there is to see and learnt everything there is to know, and they find life, oh, such a stale kind of game! We are all cynics here."

"You don't look like one," said Frank. He thought she looked like a wood-nymph who had strayed into Fleet Street.

"Oh I," said the girl, "I haven't an illusion left." She thrust out her arm to him.

"Could you do up that button?" she said. "The little beast won't poke his head into the right place!"

Luttrell said: "Oh, allow me!" and fumbled over the glove.

"I say!" he said, "this is a teaser! Do you mind if I get round a bit?"

He got the button sideways and prayed silently that it would not resist his desperate efforts. Then he looked up with a flushed face.

"You are laughing at me!"

"You have not been blessed with sisters," she said.

"Now, how did you guess that?" he said, astonished at such intuitive knowledge, and again getting a grip on the button.

"Well, it is evident you haven't had much practice."

"Oh, by Jove, no, I am a clumsy idiot. . . . Perhaps you will let me get a bit of practice now and again. I'd love to. . . . Look, it's done!"

"Wonderful!" cried Katherine. "I really never thought you would do it."

"It was a thrilling moment when the little beggar went home," said Luttrell, staring at the button as if it were some amiable insect.

Their eyes met and they both laughed.

"Thanks so much," said the girl, and before he could say another word she darted out of the room.

Frank Luttrell sighed when she had gone. The room felt very lonely without her. But he was not left alone for long. Four or five men came into the room in a group laughing and talking noisily. They stared for a moment at the tall, boyish stranger who was turning over a file of the newspapers, but took no further notice of him, and stood round the fireplace discussing the incidents of some banquet of the preceding evening.

"Did you see the acrobatic performance of Little Jemmy and Sweet William?" said a squarely-built, oldish-young man, with a powerful, clean-shaven face and hair curiously streaked with white. "It was the funniest thing on earth. They were arm-in-arm at the top of the grand staircase, swearing eternal friendship. Suddenly Jemmy lurched forward and down they both went, sliding the whole flight of stairs and—on my word of honour—coming up at the bottom—still arm-in-arm, and very much surprised at their own success! The head-waiter said he had never seen anything so neat in his life."

There was a roar of laughter, and the oldish-young man said: "Well, I must be off to the Old Bailey. That murder trial finishes to-day." As he passed the telephone bell rang and he answered it.

"Frank Luttrell? Who's he?" He turned round and said, "Is there a fellow named Luttrell here?"

"Yes," said Frank.

The man at the telephone stared at him for a moment with extraordinarily keen cold eyes.

"Oh," he said, "Vicary wants you upstairs." Luttrell went up, and, asking the way to the news-editor's room from a messenger boy, was shown into a big room where Vicary sat at a desk looking at a number of photographs which were being handed to him by a man with a bowler

hat. At his side was a secretary arranging newspaper cuttings.

"Good lord!" said Vicary, "what's the good of bringing me pictures twenty-four hours old? Take 'em away."

He thrust the pile of photographs at the man with the bowler hat, who took them with a crestfallen air and without a word stepped out of the room.

"Jones," said Vicary, turning to the secretary. "Send a wire to the town-clerk of Leeds asking him to reserve a seat for the Bennett trial. . . . Oh, morning, Luttrell. Happy with yourself? . . . Jones, this is Mr. Luttrell, now on the staff. Mr. Luttrell, Mr. Jones. . . . Perhaps you will explain to him, Jones, that this is an office where men are required to work early and late, morning and night, week-days and Sundays, Boxing days and Christmas days, for better or worse till death us do part. . . . What are you going to do for us to-day, Mr. Luttrell? Oh yes, that murder at Bermondsey . . . see it in the *Star*? . . . Nose round, won't you? there may be something in it. See me at six o'clock to-night. . . . Thanks. Morning. . . . Jones, remind me about that engagement at ten to-morrow."

Luttrell hesitated, became rather red in the face, and then, seeing that Vicary ignored his presence and was giving his attention to other matters, slipped out of the room. On the landing he gasped, and said in a low voice to himself: "Murder, Bermondsey, see it in the *Star*. Nose it out. . . . What on earth does he mean? What the dickens am I to do?"

CHAPTER IV

FRANK went downstairs and found the reporters' room deserted. Then he went out into Fleet Street and bought a copy of the *Star*, where he found a three-line paragraph stating that a girl had been murdered in her bed at Bermondsey. No name or address was given. Luttrell had no geographical knowledge of outer London, and it was with some humiliation that he inquired as to the whereabouts of Bermondsey from the policeman on point at Ludgate Hill.

The details of that first day of journalism still remain in the memory of Frank Luttrell as a nightmare with some elements of farce. He had not the slightest idea how to get into the heart of a murder mystery, and he suffered torture in his endeavour to overcome the natural timidity of his character, in order to proceed on some scheme of criminal investigation. At the police station he was told curtly by the inspector that if he asked no questions he would hear no lies. At a baker's shop he bought threepennyworth of buns, which he did not want, and came out of the shop without putting any question upon the subject of the crime to the fat, floury man behind the counter. Seeing him lingering in a curious way, the baker became so obviously suspicious, that Luttrell immediately asked for a currant loaf. In Bermondsey he was then confronted with the problem of what to do with his burden, and for the first time in his life he discovered the difficulty of getting rid of a parcel in crowded streets. He offered the buns to a little girl, but a man came up and said, "None of that, or I'll bash you." Finally, in des-

peration, Luttrell deposited them in an underground lavatory, from which he fled hurriedly like a man guilty of a dreadful crime. Half-way through the day the brilliant idea struck him that he might pick up some valuable news in a low public-house standing at the corner of a side street. He pushed open the swing doors and found himself in a reeking taproom where a number of evil-looking men were talking to a fat woman with yellow hair who stood behind the bar.

At the appearance of the tall, boyish stranger in the tweed suit there was a dead silence among the men, who stared at him with a kind of sullen suspicion.

"What's yours, young man?" said the yellow-haired lady, sharply.

Luttrell hesitated. For the moment he had not the slightest idea what to ask for. Then he said in a nervous way: "A glass of ale, if you please."

The woman wrenched at a silver handle and passed him a glass of yellow liquid. Luttrell gulped a mouthful and found it so inexpressibly nasty that he had to cough violently in his handkerchief. There was still a dead silence among the men, but one of them grinned and winked solemnly at the slovenly barmaid. Luttrell was in a state of abject confusion. He could not muster up courage to drink another drop of the filthy beer, and yet he would look a fool if he were to leave at once. He attempted a conversation with the lady.

"Fine day, is it not?" he asked, with what he knew was a futile attempt at gallantry.

"Not knowing, can't say," said that lady, turning her back on him to fetch down a bottle labelled "Old Tom."

Luttrell was crushed at once and after an awkward pause, said, "Good-morning," and thrust his way out through the swing doors. As they closed behind him he

heard a loud guffaw of laughter, which sent the blood tingling to his ears.

"Good lord, what a fool I am!" he said. "What on earth am I to do next?"

For an hour or more he wandered about the streets, trying to remember some detective tales of Eugene Sue and Emile Gaboriau which he had read in his youth. But the criminal investigators in those stories always had access to the scene of tragedy and invariably picked up clues which gave them something to work on. Poor Luttrell was in Bermondsey—the squalor of the place and people dragged his spirit down into his boots—but nearer than that, he could not get to the tragedy which he was supposed to be "nosing out." He made one more desperate effort, and, taking his courage in both hands, spoke to a seedy-looking man who was leaning up against a blank wall at the entrance to a court.

"Do you happen to know anything about a murder in this district to-day?" he said politely.

The man stared at him, shifted his position, spat on the ground, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Swelp me bob," he said. "What d'yer tike me for?"

"I thought you might know some details," said Luttrell in a casual way, as if murder might be an everyday affair in the neighbourhood.

The man narrowed his eyelids and his mouth hardened into an ugly expression.

"Lor' bli' me," he said hoarsely, "what are yer gitting at? Go to 'ell, and blast yerself, won't yer? I'm an honest working-man, out of a bloomin' job."

"Oh, all right," said Luttrell; "I'm sorry to have troubled you."

He moved away and pretended to study the paper-covered novels in a newsagent's shop.

"Well!" he said to himself. "This looks as if I am going to make a bright kind of pressman!"

He shrank from the thought of going to the office without a single word of information. Good Lord, he had not even discovered the whereabouts of the murder. What a hopeless idiot he would look!

He stayed in Bermondsey, getting into a more desperate state of mind as the darkness crept into the streets and the shop windows flamed out with electric light. He had had nothing to eat but three sandwiches. His feet were tired with walking, he was faint with hunger, and a nervousness consumed his strength still more. At last, after a few more inquiries of an equally futile character, he went back to Fleet Street desperately disheartened. He thought of his *Spectator* essays, and of the nature studies in the *Oxford Magazine*. "I have got down to the mud," he said to himself, and then, looking down at his feet, saw that he was literally bespattered with the filth of the London streets on a damp, slushy day.

He went into his office, and on the landing of the second floor met Vicary in his shirt-sleeves.

"Hulloa!" said the news-editor, stopping for a moment in his swift stride down the passage. "Got anything?—Had a good time?"

"No," said Luttrell, "I am sorry to say I couldn't get any particulars—not any, to tell the painful truth."

Vicary grinned.

"Didn't think you would, my boy. I sent Burton out, and he got all the details there are. Besides, they're all in the late *Star*. Well, good-night. See me in the morning."

He strode away and Luttrell went downstairs feeling silly with himself.

The reporters' room, into which he went wearily, had

the stale odour of a third-class smoking-carriage. The desks, divided by glass partitions, were no longer vacant, and eight or nine young and middle-aged men, some of whom he had not seen before, were writing busily, the floor around them being littered with papers. One of the men, a sandy-haired fellow, had a steak and chipped potatoes at his elbow, which he ate with his left hand while he wrote with his right. Two or three of the others had earthenware teapots and thick cups and saucers in front of them. Silence reigned in the room except for the scratching of pens, the rustle of papers, and a sentence or two jerked out from behind one of the desks.

"How do you spell exaggeration?—two g's? Oh, of course. Thanks."

"Where the devil is my pair of scissors?—some confounded thief——"

"Let's see, is Cholmondeley in the Ministry?"

"Shut up! can't you? How d'you think I can write literature if you keep asking insane questions?"

The oldish-young man with the powerful, clean-shaven face and the hair streaked with white came in quickly, tossed his bowler hat into a waste-paper basket, took off his overcoat and threw it over a typewriter. Then he went to the fire and bent over to warm his hands.

One of the other men looked up.

"What was the verdict, Brandon?"

"Guilty. The jury were out fifteen minutes. When old Buckstrom put on the black cape he went a whitish-grey colour like a three-days-old corpse. The girl held out her hands as though to beat off some spectre. Then she gave a blood-curdling shriek and went down like a log in a swoon. It turned me quite sick. It isn't nice to see a pretty girl handed over to the hangman."

Brandon got up from the fire and touched a bell knob, which brought a messenger boy into the room.

"Get me some tea, Tommy," he said, spinning a shilling at him, "and toast well buttered. Don't lick it on the way back."

Christopher Codrington came in with Katherine Halstead.

"Holloa!" said Brandon, "the children seem to have been in a scrimmage!"

Two or three other men looked up and laughed.

Certainly Codrington had lost the immaculate appearance which he had presented in the morning. His black tie was up to his ears, his high dog-eared collar was limp and dirty, the tall hat looked as if it had been carefully brushed the wrong way. His patent-leather boots were muddy and his clothes were splashed with mud up to the neck. Katherine Halstead, too, was strangely dishevelled. Her hair was all tousled under her white fur toque, and there was a great rent in her black silk dress.

Codrington wore the expression of a man who has gone to the extreme limit of human suffering, beyond which nothing matters.

"If there's any gentleman here," he said in a cold, melancholy voice, "I should be grateful if he would stand me a whisky-and-soda. I have had my pockets picked."

Luttrell, upon whom Codrington's grey-blue eyes were fixed, put his hand in his pocket to feel for a half-crown.

"May I have the pleasure?" he said.

"You are very good," said Codrington—"and the only gentleman here," he added severely, with a look of cold contempt at the other men, who had not been quick to respond, and who now looked up and laughed as if he had made a good joke.

He rang for a boy and ordered his whisky, directing the messenger with a graceful wave of the hand to Luttrell, for the money. Brandon, the young man with the

white hair, turned to Katherine Halstead, who had gone quietly to her desk and was already writing.

"What's the story?" he asked. "I've been in court all day and know nothing of contemporary history."

She turned round in her swing chair and said: "If you will give me a cigarette I will give you the lurid details."

"Take 'em all," said Brandon, handing her his case.

"There's been a Suffrage raid this afternoon. Thirty-seven arrests. Crowd very rough. Chris Codrington and I were in the thick of it. The police got several of the women by the throats—and used quite unnecessary violence. Of course I shall not be allowed to say so."

"Certainly not," said Brandon. "Anyhow, I am glad the women got it in the neck. Serve 'em right. They asked for it."

"We all know, Brandon," said Codrington, "that you are a consistent advocate of brutality."

"We all know, Codrington," said Brandon, "that you are a silly sentimentalist."

"If there had been a spark of chivalry in the crowd," said Codrington, "they would have rescued those frail women from the gross savagery of those fat, overfed men who have been allowed to terrorise the inhabitants of London."

Brandon laughed scornfully.

"Why didn't you rescue the fair ladies yourself, O Amadis de Gaul?"

"I am bound to say that I should not have escaped so easily but for Mr. Codrington's protection," said Katherine Halstead. Then seeing an ironical smile on Brandon's face, she said with a sudden sign of temper, "Quarrel on the other side of the hearthrug, won't you? I have got my copy to write."

Frank Luttrell went out to get supper, meeting on the

stairs forty or fifty men who were coming up the staircase chewing the last morsels of their last mouthfuls. He guessed them to be printers and printers' readers, a race of men quite unknown to him. He wondered—and then smiled at himself for the strange idea—what their souls were like under their bowler hats, and whether any of them had ever been to Oxford. One or two of them certainly had refined faces, and looked as if they might have been gentlemen—who had given up the habit of gentility. He had heard that printers' readers were sometimes scholars who had "gone under." "Perhaps I shall come to that, one of these days," thought Frank.

His meal at a restaurant in Fleet Street was not a success. The meat was distinctly high and the cheese reminded him in an uncanny way of blackbeetles. But a strong cup of coffee put some warmth into him and steadied his nerves.

He had done very badly on the first day of his new career, and the thought of his adventure at Bermondsey was painful and humiliating. But his imagination was strangely stirred by his first glimpses behind the scenes of newspaper life. Those men in the reporters' room, and the girl—Katherine Halstead—seemed to him types of characters outside the range of ordinary social experience. Hardly a serious word had escaped their lips while he had been listening to them. Yet some of them had been onlookers during the day of the serious business of life. One of them had been a witness of a dreadful tragedy. He had been struck by Brandon's order for tea and toast after his description of the girl condemned to death. He had been impressed strangely by the calm, matter-of-fact way in which Codrington and Katherine Halstead had sat down to write their "copy," as they called it, after being buffeted and knocked about in a street riot which had led to the violent arrest of thirty-

seven women. He thought of his conversation with the girl and tried to puzzle out the key to her character. She seemed to have a touch of coquetry, yet she had spoken to him with an almost boyish candour, which he had found slightly disconcerting. She had a sharp tongue, yet she was not shrewish, and there was a pretty feminine light in her eyes. She had the gift of laughter—he had heard her first laugh on the night of his interview with Bellamy—yet once or twice there had been a certain wistfulness, even a bitterness, in her voice and words which had not escaped his ears. She had gone into the Suffrage scrimmage with as little unconcern as though it were an afternoon performance of a comic opera, and had come back with a torn dress and dishevelled hair without a word of complaint. Evidently she was a practised journalist! Yet in the morning she had admitted that women soon wear out in Fleet Street. She had called herself a cynic, but she had been very playful roasting chestnuts over the fire. Luttrell thinking of these things could not place the girl in his portrait-gallery of feminine characters, but he knew enough to put her outside the class of girls whom he had met at tennis tournaments at King's Marshwood and taking tea with the canon.

Luttrell was drawn back to the newspaper office by a fascination which he could not resist. He wanted to see more of that human machinery which would produce a penny paper to be thrust through his letter-box the next morning. A few mornings ago that paper would have meant nothing more to him than eight sheets of news on subjects which as a rule hardly interested him. Now he would see in it the result of a great human drama, the product of many brains, many temperaments, many adventures, in Bermondsey and elsewhere! Every article would be a chapter of autobiography. Between the lines of the things written he would guess the things that had

not been written. Katherine Halstead had said that she would not be allowed to describe the unnecessary violence of the police, and Luttrell realised for the first time that the writers of newspapers see behind the scenes but only reveal a part of their knowledge.

Luttrell wandered about the streets that evening with whirling thoughts. Then late at night he could no longer resist his desire to go back to the office to see the last act of this drama of Fleet Street life.

Serjeant Leach, the clerk-in-charge, had given way to another and younger man, and his six messenger boys had been relieved also, by boys with pale, pasty faces and sleepy eyes. In the reporters' room most of the lights had been turned out and only one man remained—it was Brandon, the oldish-young man with the white hair—who was asleep with his arms on the desk under an electric lamp. The room was ankle-deep in torn paper, and smelt of stale tobacco-smoke.

The scene of activity was on a higher floor, where a number of men were scurrying about with long slips of paper. Most of them went from one big room labelled "Sub-editors" to a small room labelled "Night-editor." Luttrell looked into the big room and saw twelve or thirteen men sitting at a long table. Each of them held a blue pencil with which he slashed at sheets of flimsy paper before handing them to a young man with a long nose and greenish eyes who went round the table collecting the sheets which he then thrust into the mouthpiece of a brass tube. At the head of the table sat the man with the massive face, long grey hair, and tired eyes with black puffy bags underneath them who had blinked at Bellamy's bayonet a few nights before when he had been threatened with disembowelling. He was sipping a glass of whisky and smoking the stump-end of a cigar while he gave instructions to the men around him.

In the room marked "Night-editor" Luttrell saw a middle-aged man talking to a printer in a white apron, and afterwards to other men who came quickly from the larger room to ask a question and then return. There was a light burning in a room to the right, and through the door which was opened at times Luttrell had a glimpse of an elderly man, writing hurriedly, with disordered hair. Luttrell guessed with a sudden inspiration that he must be one of the leader-writers—one of that unknown race of men who, like kings and potentates, speak of themselves as *we*.

The population of these rooms seemed to be entirely different to their inhabitants by day. Yet one man had stayed on. The Chief was still there. As Luttrell wandered about the corridors he came quickly into the passage. He was in his shirt sleeves, but still spruce and clean, and with his light brown hair well brushed. He started when he saw Luttrell.

"What, you here!" he said. "What the dickens are you doing at this hour?"

Luttrell was embarrassed. He felt as if he had been caught trespassing.

"I am having a look at things," he said nervously. "It is all rather strange to me."

Bellamy's eye twinkled at him.

"You *are* a raw recruit!" he said. "However, if you want to see things, come along."

He dashed on to a lift, and Luttrell followed him. They went up swiftly and stopped with a jerk.

"This is the composing-room," said Bellamy. "The men don't like it when I go up. It hurts their feelings."

He gave an amused little chuckle, and then stepped out into a big room with a stone floor. A number of men in white aprons were working almost silently, with quick, nervous fingers, arranging type, putting thin brasses be-

tween lines of type with extraordinary deftness, throwing out bits of lead and putting in other bits newly set, and carrying columns to a flat table, where they were framed in steel and screwed up tightly. A tall man stood among them, giving directions in a cold, clear voice.

Bellamy went up to him.

"You are driving things late," he said; "are you going to lose the trains again?"

The man turned on the Chief with a flushed face.

"Driving things late!" he said angrily. "Whose fault is it, I should like to know? We haven't got the first leader yet."

"Ah!" said Bellamy thoughtfully. "I shall have to wake up some of my gentlemen downstairs. They're too fond of writing prose poems."

The printing manager laughed ironically.

"They wear their hair a bit too long," he said. Bellamy beckoned to Luttrell and stepped quickly into another room, where there was a great buzzing noise as if a million bees were booming round their queen. Queer processes were going on, framed squares were being beaten by hard brushes; paper moulds were placed in iron boxes, into which molten lead was ladled from a great cauldron. Bellamy spoke to the overseer, who shouted in answer to him, but Luttrell could not hear what words were spoken, as the buzzing noise in the next room deafened him.

A quarter of an hour later Bellamy took him down the lift again, down to the basement of the great office, where a row of great machines stood in a silent cellar. A few stalwart fellows in greasy clothes were plunging oil-cans between wheels and rollers and wiping every bit of steel in these vast and complicated masses of machinery with anxious care. The foreman stood with his watch in his hand facing a hole in the wall. Bellamy spoke to him

about the machines in a technical language which meant nothing to Luttrell who stood by.

Suddenly there was a rattle, and a lift came down the hole in the wall.

"Now then, that's the last! Look slippy, my lads!"

A great plate was seized from the lift and put on to the roller. Two men screwed it into position.

"Let her go!" shouted the foreman.

In a moment the machine came to life, with a sudden and miraculous activity. The great roller went round, steel rods plunged to and fro with beautiful rhythm, a frame rose and fell with perfect regularity, and at each heart-beat, as it were, of those mighty organisms a batch of complete newspapers was ready for the world.

"Beauties, aren't they?" shouted Bellamy above the clash and din. "They could eat up a circulation sixty times as large as ours. That's the pity of it."

He took Luttrell upstairs again and offered him a glass of whisky. To Frank Luttrell it seemed an incredible thing to think that this little man in the shirt-sleeves who spoke to him without any air of authority, who seemed indeed less in authority than the foremen in the printing and machine rooms, should be the commander-in-chief of an army of workers, the directing brain of all that great and complicated organism.

This little man, who certainly, thought Luttrell, must have a great and commanding intellect under his light brown hair, lit a cigar, got into his coat and overcoat, and tidied up his desk, all the time telling the newest member of the staff a funny story about a certain well-known lady in society who had sued for a divorce that day. Luttrell did not see the point of the story, but laughed with polite and nervous hilarity.

"Devilish droll! isn't it?" said the Chief, turning off the

electric light on his desk. "It amused me a good deal, when Quin told me the yarn."

He yawned loudly, turned a mass of papers off a round table on to the floor, poured the dregs of his whisky into the waste-paper basket, put the glass into a small cupboard, and then left the room, leaving Luttrell behind.

"Good-night," he called out. "Go to bed, young man, or you'll be a wreck to-morrow."

"Good-night, sir," said Luttrell, following him on to the landing.

The Editor paused at the swing door on the staircase, and said with a quick and not unkindly glance at Luttrell's pale face:

"Here, don't you let Vicary work you too hard. . . . Let me know if he gives you a rotten time."

Then he went out running swiftly downstairs. Luttrell also left the office a few minutes later. It was half-past one. Outside in the street a number of carts were drawn up in front of the building, and in the large room on the ground floor open to the street a crowd of men and boys stood at a long table with trestles. Suddenly, as Luttrell stood watching them, they pressed closer together, and there was a babel of tongues. They seized great parcels of newspapers shoved over the counters to them, and carried them to the carts outside. Those served first were first away. The tangle of traffic in the narrow street was noisily unravelled and the carts clattered into Fleet Street. Then all was silent, and down the office steps came weary-looking men, who called out good-night to each other, and went away towards the trams on the Embankment.

Luttrell walked swiftly to his rooms at Staple Inn. He was so tired physically that he ached all over, but his brain was still active and excited. It seemed to him that he had been behind the scenes of a great and romantic drama in which he had met many strange characters, of whom

not the least curious was that little fair-haired man who told funny stories, polished his beautifully clean nails, smoked big cigars, and went about with smiling eyes, while in some mysterious and unperceived way he guided the policy and controlled the organisation of the great newspaper.

"Extraordinary!" said Luttrell aloud. "The world knows nothing of Fleet Street. . . . History day by day is written here, yet these historians have never chronicled their own romance."

Then he thought again of his own adventures in Bermondsey, and went to his lonely rooms in a chastened spirit and utterly weary in every limb,

CHAPTER V

A WEEK after Luttrell's mission of criminal investigation in Bermondsey, he sat in the office of the *Rag*—as he had already learnt to call the great official organ of the Liberal Party—smoking a pipe and staring moodily at a copy of that morning's issue. He was alone in the room, for the crowd hadn't yet come in, and he suddenly crunched the paper in his hands and said "My God!" in a whisper.

For the past three minutes he had been searching the sheets for a column headed: "Clothes and the Man." Having turned over the paper six times without finding it, he knew that once again he had made a vain sacrifice of his manhood and self-respect. On the previous day Vicary had sent for him and set him that ludicrous task. "It isn't my idea," said Vicary. "It's one of the Chief's little fancies, and as you're his *protégé* you had better humour him. Get big representative opinions on the subject—dukes, young peers, Jew millionaires, one or two society women would be amusing—and, as a last resource, Cyril Townsend, who pretends to be the best-dressed man in London, and will talk as many columns in his eagerness to advertise the fact as any damn-fool paper can print. Thanks. Now, run away, won't you, and lose yourself! Good-morning. *Very* nice weather for the time of year."

Vicary had given one of his preposterously big winks to his secretary, and Luttrell had gone out wondering whether he should laugh or cry or satisfy his immediate temptation to take a drink. He did none of these things, but with the very laudable and somewhat old-fashioned

desire of doing his duty and earning his wage he set forth to the West End of London after an anxious study of *Who's Who*, to gather representative opinions on the need of new fashions in men's clothes!

According to instructions, Frank Luttrell called on a duke, that is to say, he called on the duke's flunkey, who was reading the *World* in a square hall before a log fire. "His Grace," said the young man, with almost superb insolence, after one glance at Luttrell's card, "does not see newspaper men on any pretext whatever." Luttrell trembled in his heart before the arrogance of the manservant whom he recognised as being immeasurably his superior in social position. But taking his courage in both hands he looked steadily out of his grey eyes at the impassive face of the footman, and said with a really admirable pretence of hauteur, "Will you kindly take my card to the duke?" The man turned over a page of the *World* with a sign of impatience. "What I have said I have said," he remarked, and then poked a log on the fire with his feet. Luttrell hesitated, got very red in the face, swore dreadful oaths silently, and then summoned up his sense of humour. "You are very courteous," he said. "Thank you." He held out his hand to the flunkey, who heard the chink of money. The sound had a peculiar effect on the man, and his face, which had been as expressionless as a bronze Buddha, became more human. Then he dropped the coins which Frank had slipped into his hand—dropped them as though they had been red-hot, and a look of diabolical rage passed over his face. Frank had presented him with three-halfpence, and he left the ducal mansion with an almost fierce joy at having got even with his enemy.

He called at seven addresses which he had noted down from *Who's Who*. They included four peers, a Jew financier, a well-known playwright, and a young countess

well known in the society columns of the newspapers, and not unknown in the Court which has a golden anchor over the seat of Justice. Three of the peers were not at home. The fourth, a young man, rather too stout for his age, with a fat, baby face, happened to be in the hall when Luttrell put the question, laughed with the greatest good-nature for half a minute, and then said, "My dear fellow, ask my tailor, won't you? He does not allow me to have any ideas on clothes, and as I owe him quite a good deal, I am bound not to annoy him."

The Jew financier was away shooting, said his man, not explaining what game he was tracking down.

When Luttrell sent in his card to the countess he was surprised to be invited upstairs. He was in his bowler hat and grey serge suit, and his boots were rather muddy after walking about the streets on a dirty day. As he went up a soft-carpeted staircase, and was shown into a small room tastefully and beautifully furnished, he felt abashed, and wondered whether he could invent some excuse for a hasty retreat. But it was obviously impossible, and he found himself staring at the full-length portrait of a beautiful woman in a silver frame on a little Chippendale table. In a moment the door opened and the lady herself appeared in the flesh, and in a soft gown of grey silk. She was a dark woman of about thirty-five, with large, luminous, rather haunting eyes. She gave her hand to Luttrell and smiled into his eyes, in a sad, spiritual way.

"It is so very good of you to call," she said. "I do so love your paper! Such charming articles about everything one ought to know—the Licensing Bill, Land Taxation, and the Unemployed question."

Frank, who was somewhat embarrassed to find that he was still holding her hand, lowered his eyes before the

lady's soulful gaze, and said, "Are you interested in those subjects?"

"Oh, passionately. I am nothing if I am not a Socialist. I do so pity the poor Poor. I have taken them up as a hobby, and I find it ever so much more elevating and ennobling than poultry-keeping, which I used to go in for rather seriously. I am studying Sanitation quite furiously. It is so intimately connected with our economic and social conditions, is it not?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Frank. "In fact, I quite agree with you."

He wondered how long the countess was going to keep hold of his hand. She relinquished it with apparent reluctance, and with a long-drawn sigh. "It is so pleasant and helpful to me to meet men like you," she said. "You, who are in the very centre of life and who are animated with higher ideals than society of the present day. You will stay to tea, won't you?"

"I am afraid," said Frank, but the beautiful woman touched a bell and a young powdered footman came in at once.

"Tea, Frederick, and some cigarettes."

The countess sat down near the fire, drawing her skirt a little above her ankles and putting her feet on the fender. "Do sit down," she said, "I'm sure you *must* be cold." Frank was too overwhelmed with embarrassment to refuse, and sat on a straight-backed, gilded chair, wondering whether he had ever felt quite such a fool in his life before. When the tea was brought in the footman retired and the countess poured out for Frank, saying, "One or two lumps?" He had a stick in his hand and a hat in the other, and he wondered desperately how on earth he was to take the little Sèvres cup. He solved the difficulty by putting the hat on the floor, feeling that he

must look like a rate collector or a commercial traveller touting for orders.

The countess was smoking with that charming grace which makes a cigarette a magic thing in the hand of a beautiful woman.

"Life is so very complex," she said, staring into the fire. "It is so difficult for human nature to resist the influence of environment. That is why I am studying Sanitation so earnestly. The greatest thing, I think, is to see the underlying poetry, the passionate human impulse in the every-day interests and duties of men and women. Do you not think so?"

Frank coughed and said, "Quite so."

She leant forward a little and put one white hand on his knee, and looked earnestly into his eyes.

"As a literary man," she said, "I feel you will understand. The men in my circle, my aura, as it is called, do not have that quick perception by which soul looks into soul, though no words are spoken. But literary men see the quivering heart beneath the corsage, the throbbing brain underneath the coiffure, the spirit beating against its prison bars."

"Do you write much yourself?" asked Frank, with as much sympathy as he could get into his voice, and trying to keep his knee from wobbling beneath that white hand which glittered with a circlet of diamonds.

"All my books," said the countess, "are written in invisible ink upon the tablets of sub-consciousness."

"Really," said Frank, groping dimly for her meaning.

"Though," she added, "it is true I have produced a pamphlet on *Socialism as a cure for Society*. Perhaps you would like to see it."

"Oh, thank you," said Frank.

"Do you mind touching that bell?"

When the man came in she said, "Frederick, a copy of my pamphlet."

"Perhaps," said the countess, with a touch of eagerness in her voice, "you may care to review it in your paper. It has only been published six months."

"I am sure it is very interesting," said Frank, with a diplomacy that rather pleased him.

She put into his hand a slim little volume bound in green silk with a gold coronet on the cover.

"It is my message to the world," she said. "My ideal of a perfected humanity. Come and sit by my side and I will read a few pages to you, if you will not be too unkind a critic." Luttrell wondered how he could escape from this Circe. Her haunting eyes troubled him; the touch of her hand made his pulse beat; the fragrance of her hair had a subtle effect upon his senses. It seemed to him that he was in some strange Arabian Nights adventure. He had come in muddy boots to the house of a countess to ask a ridiculous question about the need of new fashions for men. He was sitting close to her in a beautiful room before a cosy fire, and her low, mournful voice was reading out some enchanting poetry, as it seemed, of which he did not hear or understand one single word. The whole thing was preposterous and wildly improbable. He refused to believe that it had happened. He had probably gone raving mad after a week in Fleet Street, and was sitting in a padded cell imagining the picture.

Presently the man-servant, or the mad dream of a man-servant, came in and said: "His Grace the Duke of Bolton, your ladyship."

Frank started. It was the very duke whose flunkey he had insulted with three-halfpence! . . . Yes, surely he was mad. Things do not happen like this.

"Oh, my dear duke!" said the lady, letting her book slip on the sofa and rising.

A tall young man with a little fair moustache came in.

"Got any tea left?" he said, "and will you let me smoke a cigarette with you?"

"Nice thing!" said the countess. "How very sweet of you to come."

She turned to Frank and took his hand. "Good-bye! I am so sorry you have to go. I have so enjoyed our conversation." She gave him the book and said, "A little review, will you? Oh, kind! Come and see me again, won't you?"

Frank bent over her hand for a moment and thanked her. As he left the room he heard the young duke say, "Who's your pal? A piano-tuner?"

Luttrell went out into the street, turned into Curzon Street, and then banging up against a lamp-post in the darkness, laughed in a low voice which was a little hysterical.

He had spent half-an-hour with the countess, and had actually met the duke, in spite of his flunkey, but from neither of them had he asked for representative opinions on the need of new fashions for men!

It was five o'clock, and Frank had tea and then set off again in quest of Mr. Townsend, who had gained the reputation of being the best-dressed man in London. After calling at his flat and three clubs, Frank finally ran him to earth at the Savoy restaurant. Townsend received him cordially, and asked him to join him over the dinner-table. It was nine o'clock, and for an hour the man who, to Frank, seemed merely vulgar, and dressed in an eccentric way which marked him down as being the false imitator of a man of fashion, delivered a monologue on the subject of clothes. Then he apologised for leaving in a hurry, and left Luttrell to pay his own bill, which amounted

to half-a-guinea. Frank went to his rooms and wrote his "interview" to the length of a column, endeavouring, not without success, to remember the egotistical phrases and strained wit of the man. It was eleven o'clock when he sent up his "copy," and the only satisfaction when he got back to his rooms and put his tired feet into slippers was that, after a day of humiliation and ludicrous adventure, he had at least brought a story to the *Rag*. He slept feverishly that night, dreaming of the countess's haunting eyes and of a white hand that tried to strangle him. In the morning at breakfast he read a letter from his father, telling him little details of news about the old rectory life, and then covering three pages with the description of a walk in the autumn woods. "I wish you had been with me, Frank. I miss our old comradeship and our long talks about art and literature and nature."

Frank pushed back a stale egg, lit a cigarette, and plunged into the roar of London outside the gateway of Staple Inn. The old home life, the walks with his father in the silent woods seemed a thousand miles and a thousand years away; he would like to go back; and as he thought so, Frank knew in his heart that he would never go back for more than a few days or a few weeks. He was walking now quickly towards Fleet Street, towards the street of adventure, in the air of which there seemed to be a subtle poison putting a spell into the brains of men, so that though they go a thousand miles away they must always return.

In the office he asked Leach, the clerk-in-charge, for a copy of the paper, which he opened with a smile, thinking of yesterday's visits to dukes and peers and the countess, which had resulted in a column interview with Cyril Townsend. But having turned over the pages of the paper several times, he saw with a smarting spirit that it had not been printed. Not a line! not a single line! It

was then that he had crushed the paper in his hand and said "My God!" in a whisper.

He could not understand it. He suspected that there must be some conspiracy against him—to keep him under, to bring about his dismissal. Perhaps Vicary objected to his appointment by Bellamy. Yet, though brusque, he was always genial and hearty in his manner. Perhaps he had not got the right touch for journalism. For whatever reason he had had a wretched, disappointing week. All his articles, written with painful anxiety to make them bright, pointed and interesting, had either been cut down to a few lines or left out of the paper. Things could not go on like this. No one was paid a wage for nothing. And it took the heart out of a man who was eager to do good work, and who did not spare himself in his endeavours, which extended over many hours, and left him exhausted or excited late at night. A voice interrupted Luttrell's gloomy reverie.

"Are you thinking of the silent, sombre woods, Mr. Melancholy Jacques?"

Frank started, and saw Katherine Halstead. She was in a blue coat and skirt and big black hat, on which a snow-white bird had perched, and she stood with one elbow on the back of a chair and her chin propped in the palm of her hand. It was a pretty attitude—she had the gift of pretty attitudes—and for the first time it struck Frank that her face was like one of Romney's portraits of Lady Hamilton, in her early days as Emma Hart—the one with the muff and the mischievous eyes.

"I was not thinking of anything half so pleasant," he said. "I was in a rather murderous mood, to tell you the truth."

"Tell me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

She spoke lightly, but there was a note of sympathy in

her voice. It was an invitation to him to confide his trouble. She sat down with one foot on the fender, like the countess on the day before, yet with a simplicity quite unlike the lady of the day before with the haunting eyes. Then she took off her hat and let it drop on to the hearth-rug. Frank, who had no sister, felt that Katherine Halstead was rather a sisterly girl. While he was thinking so she looked up with her head a little on one side, quizzing him.

"The first week is pretty miserable. One gets hardened afterwards."

"I have had an appalling experience," said Frank. "I cannot understand it at all."

He gave her an account of his adventures. She laughed at them so merrily that he was hurt.

"They amuse you."

"Yes. It is all very funny. Don't you see the humour of it?"

"No," said Frank. "It is all too painful to be humorous."

"Oh, you must keep your sense of humour or you are lost. . . . You don't understand the system, that is all."

"Is there any system?" said Frank, raising his eyebrows. "It seems rather to show a lack of system."

Katherine Halstead pretended to look very wise. Frank thought she looked very pretty.

"Listen. I will speak to you in parables."

She explained that a great London newspaper is like a beehive, in which the individual counts for nothing, the whole community being dominated by one supreme purpose. The bees go forth far and wide to gather the pollen, they come staggering back with their burden; there is a continual sacrifice of life, the drones are killed ruthlessly when food is scarce, and the slaves of the hive toil ceaselessly under relentless laws.

"This office," said Katherine Halstead, "is a human beehive. We are under the same iron law. 'The paper must be filled,' 'The paper must not be let down.' That is our hymn of sacrifice."

"Go on," said Frank. "This is quite exciting!"

"The worker bees bring home more pollen than is wanted for the hive; lives are sacrificed if it is necessary for the continuance of the hive, and the whole crowd of wriggling creatures in this particular beehive is under the awful irresistible spell of one mysterious unnecessary purpose—the good of the paper."

Frank laughed.

"Your metaphor is mixed, isn't it? But it is a jolly good one."

The girl put off her cap of wisdom and laughed.

"I have just been reading a book on bees. Perhaps I've put it all wrong. I couldn't help being struck with the simile."

"It is a pretty awful one," said Frank. "I know something about bees, and the tyranny of the hive is the cruellest thing in nature."

"Oh no, there is more cruelty in Fleet Street." She held her hand out as a screen between the fire and her face.

"It's a funny thing, I don't think men are naturally more cruel in Fleet Street than in other places. It's the system that makes them cruel. Look at our Chief, Belamy, he is the kindest-hearted little man in the world, yet he puts the paper first, before men's lives and souls. Of course when you get really cruel men like—well, one mustn't mention names—their opportunities are unlimited. If their men get tired or stale or slack, if they make a mistake or if they are not so good—or thought not to be so good—as one of the hundred people outside asking for their job, if they get worsted in an office intrigue,

out they go into the street, to become the hungry space men."

She turned round suddenly and said—

"Have you ever been on space?"

"No," said Frank. "What does it mean?"

"May you never know. . . . I have seen many men who work on space. You can always tell them by the hunted look in their eyes."

"You give me the cold shivers," said Frank.

"Oh, I could curdle the blood in your veins."

"Don't spare me. Let me see clearly into the chamber of horrors, so that I may know all in store for me."

They were both talking and smiling in low voices like children telling bogey stories round a nursery fire.

The girl told him about a man—a brilliant, golden-hearted man, who had been sixteen years on a newspaper. One morning he received his dismissal with a month's salary. The proprietor had put his nephew into his place—a gilded youth who had been living a fast life in London. The man who had given himself unstintingly to the paper for sixteen years was found dead in his bed, with one end of a rubber tube under the bedclothes and with the other end fixed to the gas-jet.

"Thank heavens, I have electric light in my rooms!" said Frank.

She told him of a newspaper office in which there had been a change of proprietors. "You must know what that is . . . a change of proprietors always means a tragedy." Sixteen men had been turned off without mercy. They had held most important positions on the newspaper. Some of them had got other places at half their former salaries. One man was writing advertisements for liver pills. Another had become press agent of a suburban theatre, and another could be found any day at the corner of Whitefriars Street begging for sixpence from

any old friends, so that he might get drunk and forget his misery.

"You can't get drunk on sixpence," said Frank.

"Oh yes, on a hungry stomach," said Katherine Halstead.

Frank looked at his companion on the opposite side of the fire-place. There was something queer in these words spoken by a pretty girl with blue eyes. Katherine Halstead caught his glance. She flushed quickly.

"One learns in Fleet Street," she said.

"I suppose that's the secret of it all. . . . Men will suffer many things in the quest of knowledge."

"Quest is a good word!" said Katherine. "But it is copyright. Chris Codrington has made it his own."

"I say, how satirical you are!" said Frank. "You are always laughing at me."

She opened her eyes at him.

"Laughing at you? Good gracious, I hope I should not be so impertinent as to laugh at a learned gentleman from Oxford!"

"You are doing it again," said Frank. "It is not my fault that I went to Oxford. As for knowledge, you seem to know everything. Is there anything about life you don't know?"

Katherine Halstead shook her head, and pursed up her lips and pretended to look very solemn and wise.

"What I don't know isn't knowledge. . . . You see we journalists," she gave a little cough, "go everywhere and see everything."

Frank leant over the fire and stared into the embers.

"Journalists have the gift of invisibility," he said, "they are always watching and nobody sees them."

"Good job too," said Katherine. "Some of us would do nicely as scarecrows."

"It's as good as a fairy tale . . . a public man speaks

some rash words after dinner and invisible hands take down his words in secret writing and publish his folly to the world. Murders are done down back streets and history is made in the courts of Europe, and men and women carve out their careers and break each other's hearts, and plot and intrigue and express their egotism and tell obvious lies, and die their little deaths, and go to their graves in the paupers' cemetery, or Westminster Abbey, according to their luck—and all the while watchful eyes are on them, and invisible people are spying, eavesdropping, and taking down notes for publication."

"That sounds like an essay," said Katherine Halstead suspiciously.

"It is," said Frank; "I wrote it for the *Spectator*—before I came into Fleet Street."

They both laughed, a merry boy and girl laugh which gave the lie to the dreadful pessimism of their conversation.

"I must go and do some work," said Katherine. "If Mr. Vicary has any commands this morning——"

"Don't go yet," said Frank. There was a note of eagerness in his voice which made the girl's eyelids flicker with a momentary self-consciousness. "I want you to tell me lots of things."

"What things? . . . I have told you everything."

"No, I want to know all about the private life of the men walking about these passages."

Katherine opened her eyes with an air of alarm. "Oh, the revelations would be too shocking!"

"I want to know what their homes are like."

"They haven't any," said Katherine, ". . . only sleeping places."

"And their wives——" said Frank.

"Journalists' wives! . . . Those tragedies have not been written down. . . . They live in little back streets

at Herne Hill and Brixton. Some of them take to drink—poor creatures—others take to religion. It is less harmful to them, perhaps, though their husbands resent it. Others just have children, and watch the clock go round while they darn stockings, and put the whisky on the sideboard before they go to bed, and wake up in the middle of the night when their husbands drop their boots by the hall table. . . . Oh, it is bad to be a woman journalist—some people call us lady journalists!—but heaven preserve me from being a journalist's wife!"

Frank was startled, and being a man brought up in the country with a very limited knowledge of women, felt curiously uncomfortable. It seemed to him for a moment that Katherine Halstead had drawn back the veil of her heart, and that he had caught a swift glimpse of some distress and bitterness, some strife with unfulfilled instincts. The words themselves had made him think. In a few sentences she had given him a vivid mental picture of miserable homes and unhappy lives. "Others just have children . . . and watch the clock go round." That had given him a curious and unaccountable shiver. But it was not the words which had made him search for a light-hearted reply without finding one, and get red in a silly, nervous way. It was a sudden expression of pain, an indefinable look of sharp discontent, which had for a few seconds hardened the girl's face. For a moment he saw that look which he had not expected to find in eyes which had often a laughing light in them—the look of the woman who knows too much, and who has felt the sharp edge of disappointment and disillusion. She rose from the fire, and Frank knew that the conversation was at an end. He could have wished it to go on for an hour.

"How we have been wasting precious time! . . . Do you mind passing over that duck?"

Luttrell bent down and picked up the black hat with the little white bird, and smoothed its feathers.

"This is charming," he said. "It suits you awfully well!"

Katherine took it from him and glanced up at him from under the brim of it, as she put it on.

"Flatterer!" she said, with a coquettishness that was half assumed.

"No, honour bright!" said Frank.

Christopher Codrington came into the room with a long, leisurely stride. As he took off his tall hat with its rakish brim, he glanced quickly from Katherine Halstead to Frank Luttrell, and his thin lips suggested the ghost of an ironical smile.

"How cosy the fire looks," he said. "Have you been telling ghost stories?"

"We've been discussing social philosophy," said Katherine. She rang up the telephone and asked if Mr. Vicary had come, and then said, "Thanks, I will come at once."

"Social philosophy!" said Codrington. "Dangerous, very dangerous! I should hardly like to tell you the horrible holes I have fallen into when discussing that subject."

His pale blue eyes were fixed on Katherine, and Luttrell noticed that they seemed to make her uncomfortable. She turned her head away, and then, with a word about having to see Vicary, left the room. Luttrell wondered, and then was surprised, at a certain sensation of nervousness—what relations there were between Katherine Halstead and Christopher Codrington. He remembered how Codrington had fingered the miniature on her breast on the night of his first interview with Bellamy, and how he had bent over her chair whispering to her one evening.

The man drew off a pair of lavender gloves and blew into them. Then he took off his long frock overcoat,

revealing himself in an immaculate morning suit. Suddenly he put the tip of his fingers to his forehead as though he had forgotten something vastly important, and then remembered.

"My hat!" he said in a low voice.

Luttrell looked at his hat, which lay on the table, a beautiful, if somewhat archaic, piece of furniture.

"What is the matter with it?" he asked.

Codrington smiled, a pale, glimmering smile.

"I do not refer to that." He hesitated, and said in a mysterious way, "May I have a word with you?"

"Certainly," said Luttrell.

"I wonder," said Codrington, "if you would lend me half-a-sovereign for one day? Foolishly, I came with only a few shillings. It is most important that I should not be entirely destitute this morning. A point of honour, in fact."

Luttrell remembered that Codrington still owed him half-a-crown. He remembered also that he had only thirty shillings in his pocket, which would have to last him a week. Still, how the deuce could he refuse the fellow? It was quite certain that a man who dressed like a duke—at least, like a duke in musical comedy—would pay him back again, and, after all, it was rather an honour to be asked a favour by this distinguished-looking colleague. Still, it was horribly inconvenient! He wished he were strong-minded enough to frame an excuse.

"By all means," he said, and rummaged in his pocket for the small gold piece which he knew was among the loose silver.

"A thousand thanks! my dear Luttrell," said Codrington. He put on his hat, altering its angle by a hair's breadth before a mirror in a bamboo hatstand, and then left the room as two or three other men came in.

One was Brandon, the oldish-young man whose hair was so curiously streaked with white. He carried a glorious bouquet of white chrysanthemums, which he put under the nose of Quin, the little dramatic critic.

"What do you think of that for a market bunch?"

"I don't think!" said Quin. "How much did they rook you for it?"

"I had 'em given to me," said Brandon. "I told Nancy I wanted them for my very special lady-friend, and she wouldn't take a penny for them."

Quin whistled.

"Introduce me to Nancy," he said, "I'd like to know her. Where did you pick her up?"

"Remember the Eagle Street case? That girl came almost as near to being hanged as John Lee of Babba-combe. Fortunately I picked up the clue of the rusty nail which led to the arrest of Nosey William, who swung for the job. Nancy hasn't forgotten. She would sell her chemise for me if I was down on my luck."

"The gods send me such lady-friends," said Quin. He put his hand in his waistcoat-pocket and pulled out a little golden heart.

"Do you think Mother Hubbard will like that bauble?"

Brandon fingered it. "Charming, but not so unalloyed as the gold of her own good heart."

"Tell her that," said Quin; "she'll like it."

"Oh, quite spontaneous," said Brandon.

Vicary came downstairs with Katherine Halstead. "What's all this, boys? Old Mother Hubbard's birthday, and you didn't let me know! That's playing a dashed low-down game with me. Why, she was a pet of mine before you boys came out of the turnip beds!"

"She mothered every one of us," said Brandon.

"Yes, and lent you money when you've blued your weekly wage," said Vicary. "Oh, I know! You can't

deceive your old uncle. What's that?—flowers, a gold locket—very nice, I'm sure! I suppose they'll go down on the expense sheets under cab-fares and tips to detectives. Nice lads, aren't you? Oh no, not at all." Luttrell was surprised to see that Vicary had left his official manner upstairs, and that in the reporters' room the men treated their taskmaster as one of themselves.

"By the Lord," said Vicary, "you're not going to leave me out of this show? Mother Hubbard would never forgive me. I should never forgive myself. Here, what can I buy in Ludgate Hill—a box of chocolates, a diamond tarrarer, or Quin's latest love-song set to trombones and castanets. What do you think she would like?"

"She likes flowers best in the world," said Katherine.

"Well, that's easy," said Vicary. He touched the bell and kept the knob pressed until a boy came running in. Vicary flicked a ten-shilling-piece at him.

"Go and get a bunch of flowers," he said, "from Robert Green. Tell him it's for me; and get back in fifteen minutes, or I'll hit you."

Christopher Codrington came back and said "Good-morning" to Vicary in his grave Charles-Grandison way, lifting his hat.

"Take those basilisk eyes off me, won't you?" said Vicary. "You look as if you'd been up all night again." He turned to Katherine Halstead and said in a stage whisper, "Don't you have anything to do with that fellow Codrington. He leads a wicked life. Sad for one so young!"

"Pardon me, Mr. Vicary," said Codrington gravely. "I went to bed at ten—and had happy dreams. . . . I have just been purchasing——"

"Buying," said Vicary—"better word."

"I have just been purchasing," said Codrington, "a small gift for Mother Hubbard."

"Oh, you have, have you?" said Vicary, seizing a handsome box of sweetmeats from Codrington's hands, and putting one of the sugared bon-bons into his mouth. "Well, I'll bet anything you didn't pay for it."

"You are wrong," said Codrington, with dignity, "and joking apart, I think you should not make these accusations against my moral character without a tittle of justification or proof."

Vicary turned round to the company and winked prodigiously at them.

"Wonderfully noble soul, Codrington!" he said. "Which of you lent him the money for these lollipops?"

There was a guffaw of laughter from the men and a ripple from Katherine Halstead. Frank Luttrell tried not to look self-conscious, and saw that Codrington's eyes met his with a silent message. He changed the subject of conversation by saying, "Who is Mother Hubbard?"

There was a silence and the men stared at one another with an exaggerated air of incredulity.

"Holy snakes and all angels!" said Vicary. "This young man has been many days in the great organ of the Liberal Government (which, by the way, no Liberal ever thinks of buying) without having come under the influence of Mother Hubbard. I decline to believe it."

"I'm sorry," said Frank, feeling that an apology was necessary. "Who is the lady?"

Vicary turned helplessly to the others, flopping his great hand on the table as though exhausted by astonishment.

"Quin," he said, "Codrington, Brandon, Miss Halstead, tell him who the lady is."

"She is our patron saint," said Quin.

"And edits our fashion page," said Katherine Halstead.

"She is the lady of the golden heart," said Brandon.

"And lives with me in Shaftesbury Avenue," said Katherine.

"For several years," said Quin, "she has mothered every young man who has come into this street of tragedy."

"She has made tea for them," said Brandon.

"And soothed their weary hearts," said Vicary, "which news-editors have done their best to break."

"She has given them words of wisdom," said Brandon.

"Which they have seldom acted upon," said Katherine.

"She has opened the sanctuary door of her golden heart to them," said Codrington.

"And the door of 40A Shaftesbury Avenue," said Katherine, "of which I pay half the rent."

"She is one of the best, the very best," said Vicary.

"And so say all of us," said Brandon and Quin and Codrington.

Frank Luttrell thought that when his colleagues disagreed their unanimity was marvellous.

"I should like to know Mother Hubbard," he said.

"My dear lad," said Vicary, "it is absolutely necessary to your immortal soul, if you go in for that hobby. Unless you swear allegiance to Mother Hubbard you will go down the slippery slope to perdition."

The company followed Vicary out of the room and walked solemnly along the corridor to a door on which was the name Miss Margaret Hubbard.

Vicary tapped, and a low contralto voice called out, "Come in."

"Look here," said Vicary, turning to Codrington, "you must do the felicitous flip-flap; it's what we pay you for."

Codrington gave his superior smile, and went into the room followed by his escort. Luttrell, who was the last

to go in, saw a lady sitting at a desk cutting out pieces of paper with a long pair of scissors. She rose as they all entered, and stood facing them with laughing surprise. Luttrell had expected to see a little old lady in black silk with white ringlets and spectacles. But he saw a woman of about thirty-five in a plain tailor-made coat and skirt. She had a pleasant face, square, with straight eyebrows, a blunt, good-natured nose, full chin and firm mouth, rather massive and almost masculine in its expression of will-power, but softened by a tenderness of expression, and by brown eyes brimming over with mirth.

She held out her long scissors and snapped them.

"Have you come to get your noses cut off?"

Christopher Codrington stepped out.

"Mother Hubbard," he said gravely, "we, the bad children who live in the shoe, have come to wish you many happy returns of the day, and to bring you little gifts, worthless in themselves, but symbolical of our love and devotion to you."

There were cries of "Hear, hear," and "Stick to it, Codrington!"

"Fiddle-de-dee," said Miss Margaret Hubbard, "at thirty-six years of age a woman should be allowed to forget her birthdays, surely?"

"Each birthday of a good woman," said Christopher Codrington, raising his hand as a sign that he was not to be interrupted, "is a golden link in the chain of a beautiful life."

Vicary said, "Is there any sub-editor with a blue pencil here?"

"It is a day," continued Codrington, "when for a little while the carking cares of the world must be forgotten, and when we come into the circle of a gracious lady's sunshine, remembering her goodness, the little acts of be-

nignity which she strews upon her path like jewels, the words of motherly kindness which fall from her lips like flowers from a dusty highroad, filling the air with the sweet fragrance of their charity."

A howl of laughter greeted this eloquence.

Miss Margaret Hubbard turned to Katherine Halstead and said very quietly—

"Kitty, my dear, will you get the waste-paper basket and put it over the head of that tall boy with the golden hair?"

It was Brandon, the crime expert, who executed the order so swiftly that Codrington was caged before he could escape. The two men struggled desperately in the corner, and Quin stepped forward and presented his heart.

"The gold is very thin," he said, "but its value is symbolic. Eh, what?"

Miss Margaret Hubbard took the trinket and fastened it by a pin to her bosom. "Nobody shall say I wear my heart on my sleeve." Then she took Quin's hand and pressed it between both of hers, which were rather large. "Thanks, friend," she said.

"Old Mother Hubbard," said Brandon, who had got worsted in the struggle with Codrington and had one end of his collar hanging loose, "may you have as many years as the petals in this market bunch. I have counted 'em—fifteen hundred and three."

Margaret Hubbard put her face down to them.

"I am glad to have good friends," she said.

Vicary came forward with his own bouquet, which had just been brought in by the messenger boy.

"Here's to you, Mother Hubbard," he said, "and may you forgive all news-editors."

"Yes, for such gifts as this." She gave a little cry of ecstasy. "Oh, oh, they are too beautiful!"

Codrington put his box of sweets on her desk.

"Your sweetness is greater than theirs, dear lady," he said.

She put one into Codrington's mouth.

"Perhaps that will stop your phrase-making, Mr. Euphues," she said. Then she put her arm on his sleeve and said, "Thanks, Chris."

Vicary had slipped out of the room, but his place was taken by Silas Bellamy, who poked his head through the doorway and said—

"Do I smell an office intrigue?"

"The Chief!" said Katherine Halstead, and the others cried, "Come in, sir, come in."

Bellamy came in smiling.

"I suppose you thought I didn't know what was going on? . . . There's very little goes on in the office that doesn't come to *my* ears, and don't make any mistake."

He advanced to Margaret and pulled something out of his tail pocket.

"Miss Hubbard. My felicitations. Pray accept this as a small token of my esteem."

It was a golliwog whose white eyes glared at the company with a ludicrous air of surprise.

"Beautiful boy!" cried Miss Hubbard, giving its black nose a kiss.

"Ungrateful woman!" said Bellamy. "Surely that reward should have been mine."

There was a burst of laughter and Miss Hubbard said, "If you are not very careful——"

But the Chief, blushing like a school-boy, retired hastily from the room—accompanied by a new outburst of laughter.

"I have never known that threat to fail," said Miss Hubbard. "They all run away!"

Luttrell had been watching and listening in the back-

ground. This birthday scene seemed to him to present newspaper life in one of its pleasantest aspects. For a few moments the editor and news-editor had put off their authority and had joined the staff in a merry scene which was not without an underlying sentiment. Quin, the dramatic critic, who told witty wicked stories; Brandon, the crime specialist, who seemed to be interested exclusively in sordid murders and mysteries; Vicary, the big man, who gave out the orders for the day; Codrington, the easy-going, lackadaisical dandy; Katherine Halstead, like a wild rose of Fleet Street, had all come with birthday gifts to the woman of thirty-six, like a family of children to an elder sister. Yet "Old Mother Hubbard" was not so old after all. Perhaps only Codrington, and Katherine, and Frank himself were younger than this sweet-faced, smiling woman in whose eyes there was a steady, restful light, and who received the congratulations of her Chief and colleagues with simple pleasure.

Katherine Halstead took Frank's hand and pulled him forward.

"Here's a new boy for you, Mother Hubbard."

"Spank him right soundly and put him to bed," said Brandon.

"Lift him up tenderly and treat him with care," said Codrington.

Old Mother Hubbard took Frank's hand.

"Now, who may you be?" she said, looking at him with friendly eyes.

"I am called Frank Luttrell. Beyond that I am nobody."

"He has high ideals, and a pure and beautiful soul," said Brandon, and then bursting into imaginary tears, said, "Would that I were a little child again upon my mother's knee."

"He comes fresh and unsullied from a gentle English

home," said Quin, snivelling. "And, oh, the pity of it!"

"He is a young Greek god," said Codrington, in poetical intonation, "strayed from the woods of Hellas——"

"Into hell," said Brandon.

"He is one of us," said Katherine, "and we are very glad to have him."

Luttrell stood with Mother Hubbard holding his hand, and the light shafts of satire from the men made him wince. It was clear to him that those fellows thought him a weak, sensitive, namby-pamby thing. It would always be like that. He would always be lonely and friendless, kept outside the circle of men's comradeship, or treated with good-natured contempt. If only he could overcome that miserable shyness which was the curse of his life! Why could he not be like other men, frank and easy, with a tough hide and a touch of brutality and coarseness which were necessary to manhood? Even now he felt that he was looking like a booby, blushing nervously and showing that he was uncomfortable as the centre of observation. But he threw a grateful look at Katherine Halstead, whose words suddenly brought a flush to his face. They were kind, comradely words.

Margaret Hubbard patted him on the hand.

"Those boys are very foolish," she said. "But you will find that we are a happy family in this office. We live on the bright side of Fleet Street."

She turned to the others.

"Look here, young men, if you are very good I am going to invite you to a party this evening. Katherine and I have been making all sorts of goodies—toffee and tartlets, and tarradiddles. There's to be a gala night in Shaftesbury Avenue. Who will come?"

"Did I hear toffee and tartlets?" said Quin. "We will all come. I speak on behalf of the *Rag*."

"Well, pass the word round. Old Mother Hubbard at

home 9 to 12. Music, muffins and moral conversation. Strictly moral, if you please! R.S.V.P."

"We have much pleasure in accepting," said Brandon very politely.

"Mr. Christopher Codrington begs to thank Mother Hubbard, and will, D.V., be present at her little gathering. Should he unfortunately be prevented by acts of God and news-editors——"

"No excuses accepted," said Miss Hubbard. She turned to Frank: "I shall expect you too, Mr. Luttrell."

He accepted eagerly, and smiled into the brown eyes of Mother Hubbard. There seemed to be an understanding between them already. No one could doubt the frankness and kindness and cheery good-nature of that unconventional woman.

Katherine Halstead, who was standing by his side, put her hand on his arm for a moment.

"You are telling the truth when you say that you will come?"

Their eyes met for a moment. Frank was pleasantly surprised by the eager invitation in Katherine's glance. It made his pulse thump for a moment. It made him look forward to that evening party with an excitement which he could hardly understand.

"Oh, rather!" he said boyishly.

A messenger boy came into the room.

"Is Mr. Luttrell here?"

"Yes," said Frank.

"Mr. Vicary wants you, sir."

"Oh, oh," cried Margaret Hubbard. "If he gives you an evening engagement I will jab the scissors into him."

"I shall have to play truant," said Frank.

He went upstairs, astonished at his light-heartedness. He wondered why life seemed to be a more merry game

since yesterday, when he had found it stupid and exasperating. The sparkle in Katherine Halstead's eyes seemed to have lighted some fire in his heart which yesterday had been filled with the cold ashes of disillusionment.

He went briskly into Vicary's room and got his "assignment," as it was called. He was marked down for a day in a London police-court.

"Bendall has been in good form lately," said Vicary. "You ought to get some good fun out of it. I'll keep a column open. It's a chance for you, my lad."

Frank said "Right-o, sir. Thanks very much," and went out of the room. On the landing he said to himself, "Good fun!" in a wondering way. He suspected that his sense of humour was not very keen.

CHAPTER VI

A NEWSPAPER man has no difficulty in getting into a police-court—unless he has to fight his way through a crowd of Suffragettes—and Frank Luttrell had only to show his card to be admitted to a whitewashed room divided into box-like compartments for solicitors, witnesses, clerks, officials of the court, and the general public—represented by a row of unshaven men of the obviously “unemployed” class.

About thirty young policemen sat with their helmets in their laps nudging each other in the ribs and laughing in excellent spirits. In a box by himself hardly big enough to hold him sat a fat inspector with a heavy, frowning face who picked his teeth and sucked his toothpick. Underneath the magistrate’s seat, which was raised on a dais, the clerk of the court, a thickset man of middle-age, with an apoplectic neck and bald head, arranged his papers, shovelled snuff into his nose out of a doubled-up envelope and occasionally referred to the weather or the charge-sheet to the usher who had respectful manners, a blue clean-shaven chin and rusty black clothes like a manservant in a decayed but genteel family. Three benches in a box labelled “witnesses” and some seats outside the box were filled with rows of peculiar people. There were several young men with bullet-heads cropped closely all over, except where a single lock in front was curled round and plastered over the forehead. They wore coloured handkerchiefs round the neck and brown cloth suits, and they spoke in hoarse whispers and laughed hoarsely as though they had lost their voices by shouting too loudly

and too long. Next to them were two or three well-dressed men, evidently gentlemen, who looked uneasy in their position, and had restless eyes and hands. One man, tall, with white hair and a grizzled moustache, and the straight back of an old soldier, sat, with his silk hat at an angle, staring at the window through which the January sun crept with a pale gleam. Frank's eyes rested on him, and it seemed to him that he had never seen such a look of stern grief.

Next to this man was a young woman with a baby at her breast, which she rocked incessantly, and hushed loudly every time the child gave a little wail. The woman's face, pallid and pinched, with high cheek-bones, and long, thin mouth, and dull, despairing eyes, into which tears came flooding at times, scalding tears which she did not trouble to wipe away—sent a stabbing pain to Frank's heart. She looked as if she were starving. Yet the child, upon whom her tears fell, was plump enough. But starving or not, it was evident that she was the victim of misery. Once she broke into a kind of whimper like an animal in pain, and for the first time the elderly man by her side stirred, and spoke a word or two to her, and touched her baby's cheek.

There were other women there, with faces even more dreadful to see. With shapeless bonnets and wisps of grey hair tied up behind, they sat in frowsy clothes, staring in front of them, sullenly, one or two of them rather wildly, with a mad light in eyes which came bulging out of faces blotched by drink. They did not seem to know each other, and sat in separate places, but there was a strange likeness among them, their faces had been cast in the same mould—of evil lives, vicious environment, and the indescribable horrors of the lowest pit of the underworld. Here and there were respectable men with quiet, steady eyes, and a dignity which belongs to the

honest working man in working clothes; and here and there were foreign men and women, with the thick lips, the glittering eyes, the curved nose of the human beast of prey. In the midst of these strange people was a pretty girl—a typist or West End milliner perhaps—who sat with a mournful face, twisting and untwisting a handkerchief. Frank wondered what tragedy had brought her to this court where she was as much out of place as a dove in a slaughter-house. Frank had lived nearly all his life in the country where his observation had been trained to watch small signs and small facts, to listen to the fluttering of a bird in a bush or to its startled note of fear or to the ecstasy of its song of love. Now in London he was always watching the human face and listening to the human voice, more varied and more wonderful in their revelation than the sights and sounds of the nature world. In this court he saw many faces and many pairs of eyes, and in all of them except those of the young policemen, there was either fear, or despair, or cruelty, or dull resignation. The sound of the voices made him shiver—the sound of the hoarse whispering of evil voices, of a cruel chuckle of mirth from one of the bullet-headed men, of a woman's whimper, of the fat, greasy, careless laughter of young constables, at the wailing of the child at the breast of the woman with the pinched face, and of a cornet which in some street outside was playing with long-drawn, melancholy notes the old tune of "Home Sweet Home."

Frank wrote a line in his note-book.

"Home Sweet Home!" Then he said to himself, "Good God! There's humour in that. Yes, it's devilishly humorous!"

Presently the magistrate came into court and took his seat, nodding to the clerk, who rose for a moment with the other officials. Frank Luttrell studied this well-known

"stipendiary," William Trevelyan Bendall. There was the humorist who was to provide a column of "good fun" for Vicary. There was the court jester whose remarks were always followed in halfpenny evening papers with the word "laughter" in brackets. He was a middle-aged man with grey hair, and a long, ascetic, clean-shaven pallid face in which burnt dark, deep-set eyes. It was a cold, expressionless face with a hard mouth, and as he gave a brief glance at the array of witnesses, and then round the court, Frank met that gaze for a moment and felt a cold shiver pass down his spine.

The magistrate yawned, put his finger down the charge-sheet and called out a number. It was repeated by the clerk and the usher, and by a policeman standing at a door labelled "Prisoners only," who bawled it into the corridor outside. Then began the first scene in a day of squalid drama which made Frank Luttrell flush hot and cold, go faint and sick, get angry and bitter, and then through the sheer monotony of its tragedy, become callous and unconcerned.

For many hours there came into the dock a procession of prisoners of varying ages, of both sexes, and of different classes of social life. Most of them came at the rate of one a minute or two in three minutes. There was a succession of "drunks and disorderlies"—as they were called by the police witnesses—old, white-haired men with watery eyes and toothless gums, old women in black bonnets and shiny black dresses, who whined in the dock, young women with touzled hair and hard, sullen faces, young men of respectable appearance who held their heads down and looked wretchedly ashamed of themselves, and men in the last stages of filth and rags, with claw-like hands and feverish, blood-shot eyes and gaunt cheek-bones. Some of them mumbled excuses; they had taken "a drop too much," they had been celebrat-

ing a birthday or a funeral, an old friend had been standing treat to them. But one of the younger men thrust out a long arm, naked within the ragged sleeve of an overcoat, and in a kind of shrill sob, said, "You'd get blind sime as me if you 'ad my blarsted life! I've been aht o' work six months. Oh, my Gord!"

He broke into an hysterical sobbing, and the magistrate raising his eyebrows said, "Whence these tears? . . . Forty shillings or ten days."

One man was brought into the dock with his head and throat in bandages, charged with attempted suicide. As he appeared the woman with the baby in her arms began crying loudly and piteously until she was hushed down, not unkindly, by one of the constables who bent over her and said, "Now, don't you go and make a bloomin' row, my dear. It's all right, I tell you."

"What did you want to kill yourself for?" said the magistrate. "Is there a mother-in-law in the case?" This remark, which would have brought cries of "Chestnut!" from the gallery of the lowest music-hall, brought broad grins to the faces of the young policemen in court, caused the usher to laugh in an obsequious way behind his hand, and made the clerk shake his head as though to say, "What wit! Oh, dear, what a witty man he is, to be sure!"

"I couldn't bring 'ome any blunt, and the kids were crying out for bread," said the prisoner.

"And you really thought," said the magistrate, "that by killing yourself you would provide your wife and children with all the luxuries of life? That is a strange theory of political economy, is it not?"

The prisoner stared at him blankly.

"Answer me, man," said the magistrate. "Didn't you hear my question?"

"No," said the prisoner. "Beg pardon, sir."

The policeman by the dock repeated the question.

"The magistrate says it's a strange theory of political economy, ain't it?"

"Political what? Never 'eard of it!" said the prisoner in a dazed way.

"And that's the result of our national system of education!" said the magistrate. Again there was "laughter" in court, and Frank Luttrell was now convinced that he had not been born with a sense of humour. When the magistrate went on questioning the miserable fellow with the bandaged throat, turning his dazed, stupid answers into an opportunity for making mirthless jests, it seemed to Luttrell that he was in a torture-chamber where quivering human souls were being racked by that cynical inquisitor on the bench. Finally, the man was allowed to leave the dock with a caution to be more careful of his throat in future. He stumbled out in a helpless way, and the young wife with the baby joined him at the door. As they were bundled out in the corridor Frank saw the man bend down and kiss the child, and then put both hands to his head with a long-drawn moan.

A young girl with a dead-white face and black hair, was charged with stabbing her lover. The wounded man went into the witness-box, and described how she had chased him round the table and then stuck the knife into his arm, pinning him to a cupboard.

"Why did you do it?" asked the magistrate.

"He betrayed me," said the girl in a low voice. "I wanted to kill him, I can't understand why God let him live."

"Perhaps God was busy at the time," said the magistrate. "He has so many things to attend to." (Loud laughter.)

The girl was remanded for a week, and followed into the dock by a young Italian waiter accused of stealing

a silver tea-spoon. Two witnesses were examined and the magistrate said, "One month."

"Is dis vat you call English justice?" said the prisoner in the dock. "I did not pinch de dam spoon."

"Pinch?" said the magistrate. "What does he mean by pinch?"

"What do you mean by pinch?" said the policeman to the prisoner.

"*Accidenti!* I did not pinch it, I say."

"I suppose he means 'steal,'" said the magistrate. "For misuse of the English language, another month. . . . Two months' hard labour."

A tall, good-looking, well-dressed boy of about twenty-one was brought up on a charge of forgery. Frank Luttrell saw the soldierly old man among the witnesses give a start, flush painfully, and then become as white as his moustache. From the police evidence it appeared that he was the son of a well-known officer in the army. He had become entangled with a chorus girl, and had been living far in advance of his allowance. It was this which first brought him under suspicion, and he was arrested for forging his father's name to a cheque made out for £250.

"Where did the money go to?" said the magistrate.

"To the lady associated with the prisoner," said the detective giving evidence.

"Ah!" said the magistrate thoughtfully. "I have heard that chorus ladies are even more expensive as a hobby than golf."

The magistrate was well known as an enthusiastic golfer, and his remark which seemed utterly meaningless to Frank was received with more loud laughter. In the middle of it the young prisoner turned round and saw the soldierly old man in court. Their eyes met, the boy's appealing and piteous, the old man's stern and mournful.

So the drama went on, with many different characters

in the dock, charged with crimes of violence, petty larceny, disorderly conduct, and burglary. There was no one in court to say a word in defence of any prisoner, the questions put to them by the magistrate or the clerk only seemed to bewilder them, and for the most part they remained silent, sullenly, or despairingly, or in a dazed, senseless way, while the cynical man on the bench made jesting remarks of a dull, strained, and often meaningless character, and while the officials and some of the people in the public gallery sniggered and guffawed, and waited with their lips stretched into a fixed smile for the next feeble shaft of satire or pointless pun.

As the prisoners came and went Frank noticed how they were handled by the policemen. Through the door opening into the corridor he could see the men and women as they were brought up from the cells and passed along a line of policemen in the passage, and then into the court by the constable at the door, and then into the dock by the warder. Never once was a policeman's hands off a prisoner until he stood facing the magistrate. They pawed him, not roughly, but with a kind of gentle, persuasive, almost affectionate pressure, in which there was something curiously repulsive and disgusting. But it was the magistrate who made Frank go hot and cold, and who set his nerves quivering, so that once or twice he had a kind of devilish temptation to stand up and curse him. That long, ascetic face, those keen, relentless eyes, that hard, cynical mouth, which curled into a smile as he shot some blunted arrow of wit at one of the wretched creatures in the dock stamped themselves on Frank Luttrell's brain. The casual way in which he passed sentence of "one month," "two months," "forty shillings or seven days" on these human scarecrows, these blear-eyed old men, these whimpering old women, these haggard, weak-chested, half-starved boys, was damnable in its brevity

and iteration. In twelve minutes by Frank's watch he condemned ten men to an aggregate of eighteen months' hard labour. Hardly one of them had said a word in defence, not one of them had a friendly voice in court to say a word in his favour. The magistrate always accepted the police evidence as conclusive. Probably the prisoners were guilty of the crimes with which they stood charged, but Frank Luttrell wondered whether any innocent and ignorant man or woman would ever get the benefit of the doubt, or escape from those policemen's paws, in this court of summary jurisdiction where it seemed that every accused person was held guilty before the mockery of a two minutes' trial.

When the court rose for the day Luttrell went out into the street feeling as though he had been beaten with rods. A few months ago in the old Abbey School at King's Marshwood he had called out for "Life." He had wanted to escape from his solitude into the whirlpool of humanity. And this was life! For seven hours he had been behind the scenes of human passion, vice, weakness, and tragedy. In imagination he followed that procession of men and women through the door of the court into their prison cells, and saw their dreadful eyes staring at the blank walls, and their wretched bodies writhing on the stone floors; and in imagination he visited the homes they had left behind, with miserable, starving wives and wailing children. It was all a terrible vision into the mean streets of life in London, and Luttrell, born in a village rectory, taught by a father and mother of high ideals and infinite love, knowing more of the silent woods than of the crowded streets of life, self conscious in the presence of his fellow-men, and sensitive by nature and upbringing, had suffered mental and spiritual torture during this day of revelation. He went into a public-house close to the police-court and asked for a whisky-and-

soda. The glass trembled in his hand as he took it, and he gulped down the liquid like a man who has survived a shipwreck or some great shock. He repeated the words Vicary had said to him in the morning, "There will be good fun in it!" And then, thinking of what he had seen during the last seven hours, he said—

"Fun, oh my God! Good fun!"

Darkness was creeping into the streets as he walked back to Staple Inn, and a great tide of men and women was surging down Holborn, going homewards after office hours. The light of electric-standards and shop-fronts streamed upon their faces as they passed him, so that to his overwrought imagination they seemed like dream faces, ghost faces, hurrying to eternity. He was glad to get into the quietude of Staple Inn, out of that crowd of human souls with their unknown passions, and vices, and miseries. Perhaps some of them would be brought up at Bow Street next morning, before that man with the ascetic face and cynical smile who would give them one month or two months, with a jest or a jibe!

In Staple Inn there was a pool of silence with the dull roar of the traffic beyond. A black kitten came miauling up, and stroking itself against Frank Luttrell's leg. He stooped down, and picked up the ball of black fluff and pressed it against his chest. He felt a curious affection for this little wandering, lonely creature which had come up to him out of the darkness. Passionately fond of animals, it appealed to his sense of comradeship and to the protecting pity which the strong feel for the weak.

"You and I both seem forlorn creatures wandering in the dark," he said.

He took the kitten with him upstairs to his rooms, and gave it some milk which it lapped greedily. It made him feel less lonely when it sat on the table in front of him, playing with his pipe, and chasing its own tail.

"Funny little beggar!" he said. "It doesn't care a damn how many broken hearts there are or how many souls are racked in the torture-chambers of life! Would to heaven I had been born with a tail to chase!"

He sat down to write his article, his article of "Good fun." He glanced at the clock. In another hour he ought to be at Mother Hubbard's birthday party. His heart gave a leap. After all, he was glad he hadn't been born with a tail! Katherine Halstead would be there. He wanted to see her in her own rooms, away from the *Rag*. He wondered whether he would have the chance of sitting near her, and what she would be dressed in, and whether she would be in a merry mood. It was curious how her face haunted him. He had seen it in court, several times, in the pale gleam of sunshine that had come through the windows, in the dock by the side of a woman with bloodshot eyes and a broken nose, in his note-book when he had been scribbling aimlessly, making all sorts of stupid patterns with his pencil. He wished he could draw figures and faces. He would have liked to have drawn her as she sat on the floor roasting chestnuts, with the firelight on her face; or standing with her arm on the back of a chair and her chin in the palm of her hand. He wondered whether he would ever find the key to her character. She baffled him. He could not tell what was the meaning of the fretfulness and discontent which sometimes seemed to make her a little hard and bitter. She seemed to know too much about the ugly things of life, and yet sometimes she was very girlish, with a laugh that was clear and merry and melodious.

The kitten had curled itself on his lap, and was purring in its sleep. Luttrell lit his pipe, and with his elbows on the table faced a neat pile of blank paper. Presently he began to write, stabbing the paper with short, swift sentences, his lips curled into a grim smile. Oh, he was en-

joying himself! He was dipping his pen not into ink but into vitriol, and with this biting acid he etched out the portrait of William Trevelyan Bendall, stipendiary magistrate, as he administered justice in the court of summary jurisdiction. He wrote for three-quarters of an hour and then lifted the kitten off his lap and put it down on the rug before the fire.

With a glance at the clock he rushed off to Fleet Street and handed in his article to Vicary who was still at his desk, working in his shirt-sleeves.

"You're just the man I want to see," said Vicary. "Is that your police-court stuff? Good. . . . Look here, there's been a jolly motor-omnibus smash at Hornsey. One killed and five injured. Get off at once and find out more details."

Luttrell hesitated.

"I had a private appointment," he said. "Miss Hubbard——"

Vicary stared at him.

"Private appointment! Did I hear you say *private appointment*?"

He swore a frightful oath, and then laughed as though his anger had changed to mirth.

"My dear, innocent boy," he said. "Surely you don't imagine that any newspaper man has a right to make private appointments? There is only one law in this street. If you are going to be married, if your wife has twins, if she has run away with the next-door neighbour, if your mother is drawing her last dying breath, you've got to go to Hornsey or to hell, or anywhere else, if the *Rag* wants you to go. Understand?"

"Yes," said Luttrell.

"That's all right. Then get off, and don't waste time."

Luttrell went out. He had not an exact idea where Hornsey was. He guessed vaguely that it was some-

where in the East End. But he knew that not far away was Shaftesbury Avenue, where Katherine Halstead and "Old Mother Hubbard" had some coffee and tarts waiting for him. He had been eager all day for the hour when he might knock at the door of a little flat and hear Katherine Halstead's laughter beyond the door, and see her coming to him across a cosy room.

It was cold and foggy in Fleet Street. He was tired after an exhausting day. But the *Rag* wanted him, and he was the slave of the *Rag*. He turned his face eastward, away from Shaftesbury Avenue and from Katherine and Mother Hubbard. He was beginning to know the meaning of newspaper life. Katherine Halstead was right. The system was very cruel.

CHAPTER VII

AT half-past nine Luttrell stood on the top landing of a house in Shaftesbury Avenue. It was over a bookseller's shop, now barred up for the night. On a small door in front of him, under a dim gas-light, was a brass plate with two names on it: Miss Margaret Hubbard, Miss Katherine Halstead.

Luttrell had made desperate efforts to get here. He had gone down to Hornsey, interviewed the driver of the wrecked omnibus who was shedding tipsy tears in the charge-room, and two passengers who having been saved from death were now making their thanksgivings in the bar parlour of a gin-palace. He had written his story coming back in the train, had rushed up with it to the news-editor's room, and then had hailed a hansom and told the driver to take the shortest cut to Shaftesbury Avenue.

Now that he stood outside the door of the flat he had a strong determination to turn back. He was splashed with mud, cold to the bones, and he had just remembered that he had eaten nothing since midday. It was a disgraceful hour to call on two ladies for the first time. He would creep downstairs, and go to the nearest restaurant for a quiet meal.

Through the doorway he heard the sound of ladies' voices and the ripple of a woman's laugh. It was Katherine Halstead's laugh.

Frank touched the knob, and heard an electric-bell ring inside. A heavy footstep came along the passage. He wondered whether there was still time to "do a guy" as he called it in his old college slang. What a weak

fool he had been to set that bell ringing, and what a miserable wretch he would look if he went in!

The door opened and Brandon stood in the light.

"Hulloh, young feller! So you've come, have you? The ladies have been taking your name in vain."

"Look here, Brandon," said Frank, "I have changed my mind. I'm not a fit object for a lady's flat. Say it was a beggar, and let me bolt."

Brandon grinned at him.

"Come in, man; what the dickens are you talking about?"

He took his arm and dragged him inside, and then marched him along the passage like a prisoner.

"All right," said Frank, smiling in spite of his nervousness. "I'll go quietly."

"You'd better," said Brandon, "or I'll give you the frog's march."

He released him at the door of the room at the end of the corridor.

"Here's one of the laggards," he said.

Frank went into the warmth and light of a cosy room to the sound of a tinkling piano, and the quiet hum of voices. He was conscious that several people were there, but he saw only Katherine Halstead, in a white dress, who came towards him and took his hand, and said, "We had given you up as a lost soul."

She had a deep red rose at her breast, and the heat of the fire seemed to have touched her cheeks, giving to them a warmer glow.

She led Frank by the hand towards Margaret Hubbard who was doing some crochet work in a low chair, with an electric stand-lamp pouring its white light upon her.

"Here is another of the truants," said Katherine.

"Who has come starving, I can see," said Margaret Hubbard. "Why, the boy's face is like a banshee. Here,

put him by the fire, and warm up the cockles of his heart, while I go and seek some provender."

She took his hand, and said, "Bless me, it's as cold as a toad. I suppose that dreadful tyrant, Mr. Vicary, sent you off to some horrible haunt when you ought to have been having dinner."

Frank gave an account of his day in a few words."

"What cruelty!" said Katherine. "A day in the police-court and motor smash in the evening. Really, I shall have to speak seriously to John Vicary."

She looked as though she had made up her mind to dismiss her own Chief, and Luttrell felt comforted for the fatigue of his day.

"What we want," said Brandon, "is a society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Poor Pressmen. It is a long-felt want in Fleet Street. Chris Codrington, there, would do famously as Honorary Secretary, on a private salary. He would get subscriptions from Duchesses who want to reconstruct their character and from Gaiety actresses prepared to pay for a puff."

Codrington was deep in a big embracing chair, with a cushion behind his head, and his face tilted upwards so that its profile was silhouetted in the red light of a lamp behind him. He was in evening dress with a soft frilled shirt, and a coat with deep lapels, so that he seemed like a figure cut out of one of Dendy Sadler's pictures of Georgian bloods. His eyes were shut and he seemed asleep, but when Brandon spoke he put up his hand and said, "Hush, Brandon, your raucous voice jars upon the melody of my thoughts."

"A pretty egoist, isn't he?" said Brandon, gazing at him with a kind of angry admiration. "I wonder he don't hire himself out as a peepshow at a penny gaff."

Luttrell found himself on a low stool by the fire with a silver tray on a coal-scuttle, with a cup of hot coffee

sending an exquisite fragrance to his nostrils, and a plate of fancy cakes and sweets enticing him seductively, Mother Hubbard was on her knees before him, and said, "Shut your eyes and open your mouth, and see what God will give you." Frank was obedient, and God, or Mother Hubbard, gave him a sweetmeat which sent a thrill of ecstasy down his backbone. He opened his eyes like a man who has seen a heavenly vision, and saw that Mother Hubbard was preparing another gift of grace for him.

"Hush," she said. "I will have no starving men in my flat!"

He saw that she was in a black silk gown cut square at the throat; that her brown eyes were smiling at him with a motherly light in them, that her square, good-natured face with its blunt nose was as beautiful in its ugliness as one of Rembrandt's portraits of the women he loved. Frank wondered why no man had ever loved this woman, why at least she was thirty-six and unmarried. Such a woman was meant to be the wife of some good fellow and the mother of his children. Mother Hubbard! It was a good name for her.

Katherine Halstead brought him a cigarette, and put it into his mouth before he had finished the sacred sweet. It was embarrassing but delightful. She struck a match and held it for him, and he looked up and said, in his boyish way, "I say, hang it all, you mustn't wait on me like this. I'm not used to this sort of thing."

"Do as you're bid and don't be chid," said Mother Hubbard. "Kitty, my dear, leave the child to me, and don't interfere."

"Oh yes," said Katherine. "You're enjoying yourself, aren't you! You're like an old hen with a new chick."

Quin, the dramatic critic, was at the piano running his fingers softly over the keys. Presently he began to sing, in a soft tenor, a little French ballad, light and dainty,

with a gay lilt, until the last verse, when it went into minor with a pitiful plaint.

There was silence when he had finished, and then Katherine said in a low voice, "Oh, Quinny, there was a broken heart in that! I heard it go crack in the last line." She had set herself down on the floor and was leaning her head against the piano. Frank thought she looked in her white frock like one of Jane Austen's heroines—Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*.

"A poor thing," said Quin, twisting round on the music-stool, "but mine own."

A man in a Norfolk jacket was propped up against the wall with his knees tucked up, and a sketching-block on them. He was a dark bullet-headed man with black, merry eyes and a comical mouth.

"Keep like that, Miss Halstead," he said. "You look jolly well. There's a rippin' light and shade on that light gown of yours."

"I dare say," said Katherine. "And if you could draw I've no doubt I should make a pretty picture, Pinger."

"Don't be cheeky," said the man, "or I'll make you ugly. Oh crickey! If this don't make an advertisement for Bile Beans my name isn't Ping-Pong!"

Katherine jumped up and seizing a "Shilling Album of Popular Favourites" threw it at his head with unerring aim. It knocked off the artist's pince-nez, and then he flung the book back again. It overturned one of the candles on the piano and smashed its shade. Quin, who was singing again to an accompaniment of deep, long-drawn chords, puffed the candle out at the end of a tremolo note and began the second verse.

"Who's going to pay?" cried Miss Hubbard.

"It is a fight to a finish," said the artist, with set teeth, catching a cushion which came hurtling from Katherine's hands.

"We'll settle up afterwards. Gee-whiz! one to me!"

The cushion struck Katherine full in the chest, and made her reel for a moment.

Frank rose from his seat and said, "Isn't this going too far?" His fists closed and he made a movement as if he were going to punch the artist's head. Miss Hubbard laughed quietly and went on with the crochet work, which she was doing with nimble fingers as she sat in a high-backed wooden chair.

"It's all right. They will probably break up the flat, but Kitty would rather die than give in."

Christopher Codrington opened his eyes and watched the struggle with languid interest.

"I don't approve of this horse-play," he said. "It is so extremely bad for one's clothes."

Brandon, the crime expert, was playing a game of chess opposite a tiny man with a freckled face and a fair, fluffy moustache brushed upwards, who had his head down close to the board, at which he stared with stabbing, steel-grey eyes and a ferocious frown. The combat came near them—Katherine was attacking the artist by assault and battery, with the cushion held tightly in both hands. Her face was flushed and her eyes were lighted with the fierce joy of onslaught. The artist was making a strategic move to the rear, with a right arm held up in defence. Suddenly he backed right on to the chess-table, and sent the chessmen bouncing off the board in all directions, while the table collapsed under him. Katherine was on him in a moment stuffing her pillow over his head and face, regardless of the yell of rage from Brandon and his companion.

"Ten thousand devils," said Brandon. "I should have checkmated him in three moves."

"What!" cried the miniature man, whom Luttrell after-

wards knew to be the most famous sporting editor in London. "I had all the running from the start!"

They quarrelled violently over the split chessmen. Katherine was pummelling the head of her victim, who sat grovelling in the wreckage and pleading for mercy with half-suffocated laughter and plaintive groans. As an accompaniment to the din could be heard Quin's deep chords on the piano, and a love-song, thrilling in low and passionate strains. Miss Hubbard had stopped her crochets, and was standing up with one hand on Luttrell's shoulder, laughing excitedly.

"Is this game often played?" said Luttrell, who was leaning forward also, gazing at the flushed face, the lithe, graceful figure, the flashing, exultant eyes of Katherine Halstead. He drew a deep breath, and his pulse seemed to thump in his brain. The girl was like a young Greek goddess taking divine vengeance. But he felt uneasy. There was something which rather hurt him in the sight of this struggle between Katherine and the artist. He would not have minded, perhaps, if he had been the artist, who had seized one of her wrists while she pummelled him with the silk pillow in her right hand.

"Oh, it's good to laugh," said Miss Hubbard, surveying the scene with beaming eyes, although one leg of her chess-table was lying loose. "If it wouldn't spoil sport, I would like to join in."

Codrington rose quietly and went over to Katherine, taking her other wrist as she was about to give the death-blow to her quarry.

"The quality of mercy is not strained," he said. "It droppeth as the gentle dew from Heaven upon the place beneath."

"Let me go, Chris," said Katherine. "I will hit you."

"Hit one of your own size, fair lady," said Codrington. He took both her wrists now as the artist struggled

to his feet, and though she tried to release herself, held her tight, and smiled down at her in his pale, sardonic way.

"You cannot go," he said. "You cannot escape from me, wild bird."

Katherine Halstead's face flamed scarlet and then went rather white.

"Chris," she said in a low voice. "Let go of my hands, or I shall be really angry."

For a moment it seemed to Luttrell that the girl's eyes had filled with tears, and as Codrington released her she put both hands to her breast, panting a little.

But then she turned to the artist and laughed at him, so that Luttrell knew he had been mistaken about her tears. But how quick and transient were her moods!

"Confess you were badly beaten, Mr. Pinger."

"I give up the physical force argument against women's suffrage," said the artist, smoothing his crumpled hair. "There's nothing in it. Men are mere weaklings compared with modern females who call themselves women."

There was a new voice in the room. It came from the doorway, and said—

"God bless you, my children. Peace be unto this house."

There was a sudden silence. Quin stopped playing with a jumble of notes as his hands rested on the keys. Miss Hubbard turned her head sharply towards the door, and then with a little gasp sat down suddenly.

"Well-I-never-did-you-ever!" she said.

All eyes were turned upon a man who stood in the doorway.

It was a short man in a grey suit, with a bowler hat in his hand, and a big brown-paper parcel under his arm. The light from a hanging electric light gleamed upon a high forehead and a head going bald on top. He had the

clean-shaven face of a comic actor, with a whimsical mouth, and the blue-grey eyes of a poet or a philosopher, rather wistful and dreamy and sad in spite of the smile in them. He wore a low collar round a rather bony neck, and a yellow tie; his grey trousers were baggy at the knees, and he had heavy boots on. At the first glimpse he looked like a music-hall "artiste" who would probably produce a tame rabbit, or some conjuring boxes, from his brown-paper bag. At the second glimpse he looked like a social idealist who lives on brown bread and cod-liver oil. At the third glimpse it was clear that he was a gentleman, and probably a scholar. There was intellect behind his huge forehead, and the indefinable imprint of thought and study on his serio-comic face.

"In the name of all that is wonderful," said Brandon, "how did you get here? Three days ago I saw your name under a telegram from Turkey."

"Hush. Not a word!" said the little man. "I am in Turkey at the present moment, pulling the wires of the new Constitution. I am not due in London for another twenty-four hours. It is only my ethereal being which has come to wish Mother Hubbard many happy returns of the day.

He went over to Margaret Hubbard and took both her hands as she rose and came towards him.

"Dear Mother Hubbard," he said, "I have bribed Custom House officials, and the captains of steam-boats, and had desperate adventures to escape from the Young Turks and Persian poison-mongers in order to be in time for your birthday party."

"Well done!" said Margaret Hubbard. "Well done!"

The man and woman looked at each other with an expression of frank comradeship.

Was this Mother Hubbard's romance? thought Frank Luttrell.

Katherine had clasped the little man's arm.

"And what about me?" she said.

"What, little Kitty? Not in bed yet? Snakes alive! what is Mother Hubbard thinking about?" He took her hand and kissed it with old-fashioned gallantry.

"My dear," he said, "you grow prettier every time I see you."

The men had crowded round him, and he had a hand-clasp for each and a word or two.

"What, Brandon! how many murderers have you tracked down lately, you ghoulisn old corpse-hunter? And, Codrington! when are you going to stop growing, man? Sure now, boys, and don't he look beautiful tonight! Georgian furniture, eh what? And there is queer Mr. Quin, if my eyes deceive me not! Still singing amorous ballads of his own concoction, inspired by his latest little Gaiety girl. Pinger, the lightning artist . . . and little Birkenshaw, greatest of sportsmen. . . . Well done! This is just the merry party I saw in my mind's eye from Constantinople to Blackfriars Bridge."

He turned to Katherine. "My dear, will you unwrap that pedlar's pack? I come with gifts from the East, rubbish gathered in Oriental bazaars, thoroughly disinfected and duty paid."

Katherine snipped at the string, bringing upon herself a rebuke from Margaret Hubbard, who had a moral objection to cutting a knot. She went down on her knees and the men gathered round.

The brown paper was unwrapped and in the folds of a beautiful Persian rug, of exquisite colour-harmonies, lay a number of trinkets.

"Oh, oh!" cried Katherine, holding up a string of pearls. "Here's a pretty thing, now what shall we do with this pretty thing?"

"What else but put it round a pretty neck?" said the

newcomer, and taking it from her he suited the action to the word.

"For me?" cried Katherine; "or for the princess of an Arabian Night?"

As Katherine was on her knees on the carpet, with the trinkets scattered about her and the rope of pearls round her neck—in her white dress with its little waves of tucks and lace, her face glowing with excitement, and deepened in colour by the red firelight—she seemed to Frank Luttrell like Marguerite in the Jewel Scene. And for a moment as Christopher Codrington stood by her side, with an arm on the mantelpiece, his thin lips curved into a smile, as he looked down upon her, it seemed to Frank also that Mephistopheles was not far away. He wondered why Codrington's tall figure and cold, classical face sometimes gave him a "creepy" sensation and filled him with an unaccountable uneasiness.

"I had an impression," said Margaret Hubbard seriously, "that this was *my* birthday party, Mr. Edmund Grat-tan."

"True for you, ma'am, Miss Katherine is quite out of order. Permit me to lay this at your feet. It is the magic carpet of Baghdad. You have but to sit on the cluster of roses with your toes pointing to the east, and you shall be conveyed to the uttermost ends of the earth, as soon as the wish is shaped within your spirit. Sure now, and I'm not telling you any untruth."

On the Persian rug were some sandal boxes, a curious metal charm, some soft silks and gold thread embroideries, and the Irishman told the company to take their choice in return for a cigarette and a cup of Mother Hubbard's coffee, which he said was always more fragrant than any he had tasted in Constantinople itself.

In a few minutes the company had arranged itself into different grouping. Codrington lay at full length before

the fire, and Quin sat on the coal-scuttle with his knees tucked up, like Robin Goodfellow on a toadstool. Katherine was sitting on the Persian carpet with one arm on the knee of Edmund Grattan the Irishman, who held the central position before the fire in a low-backed chair. Brandon, the criminologist, was perched on a swinging bookcase kicking the *Encyclopædia Britannica* with his heels, while his grave, youngish-old face, on which the memory of some tragedy seemed always brooding, was lighted from above by the candles, with deep shadows under the eyes. Birkenshaw, the sporting editor, sat astride a Chippendale chair—the only one of its kind in the room which had obviously been furnished out of second-hand shops—like D'Artagnan on his Gascon colt. Pinger, the artist, was lying on his stomach with his body underneath the Chippendale chair, his elbows dug into the floor, and his black bullet head and square jowl supported in the palms of his hands. Luttrell himself was on the other side of Katherine, on the music-stool, and Margaret Hubbard moved about in her quiet, thoughtful, practical way, getting coffee for Grattan, and sandwiches, chocolate, toffee, and tarts for the other men. Katherine was the Mary, and Margaret the Martha, of that flat, and Luttrell's eyes wandered from one to the other, reading the character of these two women who had allowed him to enter the circle of their lives. Once or twice, as Margaret passed, Katherine caressed her hand, and then as the elder of the two stayed for a moment by her side Katherine put her arm round her waist and snuggled her brown head against the soft folds of Margaret's black silk dress. Mother Hubbard, as she was called, stooped down and kissed Katherine's hair, and Luttrell was strangely moved by that simple message. He had already seen how Margaret Hubbard's face was illuminated by a kind of mysterious love when she looked at the younger girl. He

was glad that Katherine lived with Mother Hubbard. There was protection and safety and a sanctuary for a restless heart in the guardianship of that woman with the steady brown eyes and the ugly-beautiful face. Katherine disquieted him, made his pulse beat quickly, made him almost wish that he had not come to this birthday party. The thought of her pillow fight with Pinger the artist disturbed him. The fellow had treated her roughly, as though she were a tom-boy sister. He did not understand that momentary scene when Codrington had held her wrists and smiled at her in his peculiar way until she had become angry, really angry, with sparks in her eyes, and then, as it seemed—afraid. He hardly liked to see her now with her arm on Grattan's knee, as though he were her elder brother. And yet, there was no trace of vulgarity in her manner, no faintest suggestion of coarseness. She had the purity and the innocence and the carelessness of a girl of fifteen in short frocks, who is not ashamed of her long legs and black stockings, and does not give a thought to the proprieties. Yet she was not like a young girl in her swiftly-changing moods that seemed to trouble her spirit like a water-brook stirred by the lights and shadows of a wind-swept sky. One moment she was gay, with laughing merriment, and then wistful, or scornful, or with a melting tenderness, or dreamy, or excited, or caressing, as the conversation eddied and swirled round many subjects, or was interrupted by short silences.

Luttrell listened to that conversation, taking no part in it. Edmund Grattan, the Irishman, was the leader. He told stories of strange adventures which had happened to him during recent months in Turkey and Persia and the Balkans, where he seemed to have been the onlooker of seething movements of revolt and reform. He spoke vividly, with a quiet humour and with an undercurrent

of enthusiasm for the spirit of liberty. He told of Palace intrigues, of mob passion, and passion of another kind in which Eastern men and women had been scorched in the hot fire of love. He described adventures in narrow alleys between whitewashed houses with high windows, and in taverns where quick words had been followed by sharp blows, and where cheap blood had flowed as well as cheap wine. As he spoke the flat in Shaftesbury Avenue was filled with garishly-coloured pictures of Oriental scenes, in which silken turbans and robes of gold-shot silk and dark liquid eyes behind transparent veils, and jewel-hilted daggers, and the red fez of Turkish officers, and moving masses of dark-skinned people in the fantastic, many-coloured costumes of Eastern bazaars, passed before the imagination of those who listened to the Irishman's words. Then, after the grim tale of a tragedy in which Grattan had stumbled over the white corpse of a beautiful Persian woman in a room hung with rich tapestries and fragrant with the scent of sandal wood—it seemed like a new chapter of *The Thousand and One Nights*—the conversation became general, and changed from Eastern politics and drama to the street of adventure at home. Luttrell knew none of the personalities discussed except those of Silas Bellamy and Vicary, and he listened, not always understanding, to the strange and fascinating jargon of newspaper life. Whenever pressmen are gathered together they talk "shop." That is the dulllest kind of talk in most ways of business, but the "shop" of newspaper men deals with the humanities and human nature. It is the technical language of men who are behind the scenes of high politics and low crimes, and all contemporary history. It is the *argot* of men who belong to a secret brotherhood, in which there are passwords unknown to the outside world. It is the "shop" of men and women who are insulted by the flunkeys of so-

ciety, but who know the secrets of courts; who are unprotected by the common rights of justice, who have no security of tenure, who are the voluntary victims of the most cruel form of individualism. It is the language of a world where reputations are quickly made and quickly lost, where intellects and temperaments are bought by men having none of either, and used up, until the dry husks of what were once throbbing brains and hearts are thrown upon the scrap-heap of broken lives.

Grattan had only been abroad for three months, but during that time newspapers had changed hands, new men sat in the seats of the mighty, old friends had gone under, one warm heart was as cold as the clay that lay upon it, a baker's dozen had got the "sack" from one "rag." But there had been some fun. Brandon had put another man's head into a collar of hemp. He had made a present of his clues to the police, who, as usual, were not grateful. Brandon also had a new and true story to tell. It was called "The Coffin that came Back." Katherine objected to it so late at night. Christopher Codrington had actually got a big scoop. How he had obtained the secret of the new War Office scheme was a romance not to be told to walls which had ears. Naturally there was a beautiful lady in the case. Silas Bellamy was still smiling and polishing his nails, but there was an uneasy feeling in the office that all was not well with the *Rag*. The ads. were dropping off and the Proprietor looked like Hamlet in search of his uncle. There was a low temperature at the Club. The dismissal of Billy Bramshaw from the rival show was about the most damnable thing that had ever been done in the street. He was now drinking himself to death.

"It makes me weep tears of rage," said Katherine.

Edmund Grattan leant forward on his elbows and stared into the fire.

"Poor old Billy!" he said. "One of the best! I must have a talk with him. Lifting the elbow, is he?"

He seemed upset by the last story, and a curious look of sadness and shame crept into his face. Luttrell knew afterwards the meaning of that look. Grattan himself sometimes drank himself to the edge of death. There were periods when he disappeared suddenly for a week or so. Nobody knew where he was, and nobody asked. Or if anybody asked, being a newcomer, he was told that "Grattan was looking for his wife." She had gone from him one night fifteen years ago, and he went to find her in low drinking bars down East, where with his head on his arms, and with bloodshot eyes, he saw her again in her beauty, and heard the voice that was like the running water of the silver brooks of Ballyhinton, and drowned his soul in the silent pools of the eyes that had been the mirrors of his heart, fifteen years ago.

"Quick!" he said, "let us put the thought of such things away from us. It is Mother Hubbard's birthday, bless her dear soul. Draw up closer to the fire, boys. We'll be little children again, and tell fairy-tales, and forget the damned old world outside the window curtains."

"Oh," said Katherine. "There are no fairy-tales like yours. They bewitch the little white soul out of my body."

"I will tell you the tale of Etain," said Grattan. "I heard it first to the music of a spinning-wheel in a cabin of Connemara, where a woman who was my mother sat in a circle of six bare-legged girls and one boy, who was myself."

"Eochaid, the glorious son of Finn, who was supreme lord over Erin, once saw a maid at the brink of a spring. A clear comb of silver was held in her hand, the comb was adorned with gold, and near her as for washing was a basin of silver whereon four birds had been chased. A

tunic she wore with a long hood; it was stiff and glossy with green silk beneath red embroidery of gold, and it was clasped over her breasts with marvellously-wrought clasps of silver and gold, so that men saw the bright gold and the green silk flashing against the sun. On her head were two tresses of golden hair, and each tress had been plaited into four strands; at the end of each strand was a little ball of gold. And there was that maiden undoing her hair that she might wash it, her two arms stuck out through the armholes of her smock. Each of her two arms was as white as the snow of a single night, and each of her cheeks was as rosy as the foxglove. Even and small were the teeth in her head, and they shone like pearls. Her eyes were blue as a hyacinth, her lips delicate and crimson; very high and soft and white were her shoulders. Tender, polished and white were her wrists; her fingers long and of great whiteness; her nails were beautiful and pink. White as the snow, or as the foam of the wave, was her side; long was it, slender, and as soft as silk. Smooth and white were her thighs; her knees were round and firm and white; her ankles were as straight as the rule of a carpenter. Her feet were slim; evenly set were her eyes; her eyebrows were of a bluish-black, such as you see upon the shell of a beetle. Never a maid fairer than she, or more worthy of love, was till then seen by the eyes of men; and it seemed to them that she must be one of those who have come from the fairy mounds."

"I must set that to music," said Quin.

"It is a poem," said Codrington; "I must make a note of some of those similes, 'Her eyes were as blue as a hyacinth.' That reminds me of someone I know." He turned on his side as he lay on the rug before the fire and looked over at Katherine.

She drooped her eyes and said, "Go on, what happened to the beautiful Etain?"

Margaret Hubbard raised her hand.

"No," she said, "don't go on, there is the telephone."

"I guess Vicary is at the end of the wire," said Brandon. "That's to fetch me to a murder. I'll be hanged if I go."

Margaret Hubbard had the receiver to her ear.

"Yes," she said, "they are all here. . . . What, all three of them? Oh, heartless! . . . Poor boys. . . . Oh yes, I know. Loyalty to the *Rag*, and all that. A precious lot of good it does them! . . . Oh, you may trust me!"

She laughed, banged down the receiver, and clapped her hands.

"Mr. Brandon, Mr. Codrington, Mr. Luttrell!"

The three men stood up.

"What's happened?" said Codrington, wiping a little moisture off his high forehead.

"There's a tremendous fire at New Cross. You must go down at once. Vicary says it's a big story, and you will all be wanted. He will have the motor-car ready for you as soon as you get round to the *Rag*."

Brandon was already in his overcoat, which he had dashed for at the word "fire." Codrington was more leisurely, and maintained his cold dignity.

"Come on, Luttrell," said Brandon.

Margaret Hubbard fled into the next room, and brought out one silk and two woollen scarves. She gave the silk one to Katherine. "Tie that round Mr. Luttrell's neck," she said, and set the example by swathing Codrington in the woollen wrap.

Katherine darted to Frank and wound the scarf round his throat, tucking the ends of it over his chest. Her face was close to his, and he drank in the fragrance of

her breath. Her white hands were patting down the silken tie, and she drew him closer towards her as she pulled the ends tighter. Frank thought of the music of Grattan's fairy-tale.

"Tender, polished and white were her wrists, her fingers long and of great whiteness, her nails were beautiful and pink."

For a moment he was intoxicated. He would have given his soul to clasp his arms about that girl who was so close to his breast. She was Etain, of whom Grattan had told them. "Never a maid fairer than she, or more worthy of love." He wanted to lift up the soft chin and look into the eyes that were "blue as a hyacinth," and to kiss those lips "delicate and crimson." For one moment Frank Luttrell went mad, as many men do, for one moment, which gives them time enough to commit a murder, or to conceive a poem.

"Thanks awfully," he said, "you are very good."

"It is frightfully cold outside," said Katherine. "And you have been sitting near the fire."

She looked at him with a kind of pitiful concern.

"I hope you are not delicate on the chest."

"Good lord, no," said Frank. "I say, what's all this?"

Margaret Hubbard was filling his pockets with biscuits and sweets. The pockets of Codrington and Brandon were already bulging.

"They will be a comfort to you. Perhaps you'll get nothing to eat until the morning." She clapped her hands again. "Now off with you! I gave my word of honour to Vicary. Hark-away!"

Grattan, Quin, Pinger and Birkenshaw were standing with their backs to the fire, laughing at the scene of flurry.

"The same old game," said Grattan. "Truth, and it's a wonderful life!"

As they went out of the flat, with Margaret Hubbard at the door, Codrington lingered behind for a moment in the passage, and bent down to kiss Katherine. She seemed reluctant, and held her face half turned away, but Codrington touched her cheek with his lips. Frank Luttrell turned away from the light in the flat and stumbled down the dark stairway.

CHAPTER VIII

I THINK few men were ever so quickly inoculated with the subtle poison of Fleet Street as young Frank Luttrell. His temperament could not withstand it, and I had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing that all my forebodings about him were realised. To those who have never lived in the Street of Adventure, having only passed down its highway to St. Paul's or Charing Cross, it is difficult to explain the effect which its atmosphere has upon educated men of highly-strung temperament. It produces something of the same symptoms as the drug habit. The victim loathes the poison, but craves for it. He knows that he is yielding to a habit of life which will inevitably drag him down, and he is filled with self-pity and remorse; but if the phial is withheld from him he becomes feverish, restless and miserable. As with the opium-smoker all his higher instincts tell him to avoid his evil haunts. He knows that the temporary thrill of excitement will be followed by deadly depression, and by the degradation of his intellect and imagination, and that his will-power will be inevitably weakened so that at last it will be impossible to break or attempt to break his habit of life. Such a simile would be laughed at by men who have breathed the atmosphere of Fleet Street all their working lives. They have never known the purer air. They have been so long fettered that at last like enslaved animals they lick their chains.

But Frank was one who had been brought up on the mountain-tops, figuratively as regards education and ideals; literally among green fields far away from Fleet

Street, in the heart of the country, among simple souls, in an environment of beauty, in the peace of nature's solitudes. He had drunk deep of the spiritual wine that is in the holy wells of life. His mother had first held the cup to his lips when as a small boy lying on the old black bearskin by the Rectory fire she had told him stories of saints and heroes and the gentlemen of history. His father had given him the key to the wine-chest of the divine vintage when he had unlocked the glass cases of his book-shelves and said, "Frank, my boy, here is the wisdom of the world, and of all ages. I have read all these books—some of them a hundred times—and I envy you because you have read none of them. I would give much—how much I wonder?—to begin the banquet with the thirst of youth!" Frank had read many of those books, beginning with *The Thousand and One Nights*, in the fork of the oldest apple-tree in the Rectory orchard, in the hayloft above the barn and in his own small bedroom, where a shelf put up by his own hands held his own cherished volumes, which at every Christmas and every birthday increased in number. Then, as a small boy with big, serious eyes and curls about his head, he had dreamed of writing books which other boys would put under their pillows at night. Later, while the years passed, he had gone wandering through the enchanted wood of knowledge and fancy, where poets sang to him and wizards weaved their spells about him; where he plucked flowers of many colours and good fruit. Sometimes he had pricked his fingers with sharp thorns, and pulled up weeds thinking they were flowers, and had lost his way in dark and noisome places from which he shrank back shuddering. But then he had gone on seeing bright visions before him, dreaming gay dreams, seeking the spirit of beauty with her glistening skirts and the golden glamour of her divine presence. At Oxford he left the enchanted

wood behind, though its memories and its visions were unforgettable. He came face to face with some of the actualities of life and grappled or dodged the demons of doubt. But at Oxford and in the Abbey School of King's Marshwood he had still been an idealist. He lived more with books than with men, with books which filled him with a new enthusiasm for the music of thought and words, for the fine perfection of a polished phrase, for the mystical beauty which lies beyond the reach of art. In his rooms he had attempted to express, feebly and unsuccessfully at first, something of his own temperament, groping his way to the heart of his own mystery. He tried to hold some of the strange, thrilling moments which at the sight of a sunset over the Abbey Tower, or in the silence of a wood, or on a hill top where the birds rose singing from the grass, stirred his senses with emotions which he could only dimly understand. Gradually the art of expression caught hold of him. He experienced the joy of technique. He became an adventurer with words and ideas. With the audacity of youth, yet not without humility, he began to believe that he might one day take a place in the world of letters and write his name on some small stone of that great temple in which he had worshipped since his childhood, when his mother had read him the story of Marathon and his father had recited Chapman's Homer to him up the white winding path which led to the hill-top.

Then life had called to him, suddenly and with an appeal which he had to obey. He must get into the heart of life before he could become a man of letters. He must know and see and suffer before he could be a truth-teller.

So after tilting at windmills as a freelance Frank came to Fleet Street. From Arcadia he had come into Alsatia. I think, indeed I am sure, that after a few weeks he knew he had left the hill-tops for the mire. To a man of his

training and temperament Fleet Street was a place of torture. A man who has read poetry and learnt it by heart cannot be content with writing paragraphs about cats at the Crystal Palace and murders in Whitechapel and fat boys at Peckham. A man who has been bewitched by word-music does not find it easy to read an article of his own writing which has been slashed up by blue pencils and left with jolting sentences and disconnected phrases. A man who has seen bright visions in enchanted woods does not go joyfully into mean streets, into the squalor and filth of human by-ways. Other men of education and ideals would not have suffered so acutely. With stronger fibre they would have resisted the influence of such a life more manfully, but Frank was so sensitive that every nerve in him quivered at the least touch. Every rebuff in a profession, where rebuffs are constant, hurt him frightfully. Every insult, in a life of ceaseless insults, left him with an open wound. To be born a gentleman, with instincts of pride and dignity and delicacy, is the greatest misfortune to those who write history day by day.

Frank was unfortunate in being a gentleman and something of a scholar. It was not easy for him to suffer the crack of the whip in the hands of his chief Vicary, who, in spite of being a genial and good-hearted man, was, on account of the system, a relentless slave-driver. But that was endurable in comparison to the daily torture of work which compelled him to cringe to flunkeys, to be polite to low scoundrels, to smile in the face of liars, to listen patiently to the egotism of fools, to gloss over the horrors and villainies with which he came in daily contact.

Physically Frank was at a pitiful disadvantage. He was not a weakling. When I had seen him at King's Marshwood I had admired his straight back, his lithe figure, the beautiful bronze of his face and hands. But

he was like a fine Toledo blade which was not made for chopping wood. His spirit was so delicate, so highly-strung, that his body suffered. The life of a descriptive writer on a newspaper is the severest test of strength. The irregularity of hours, which often kept him out till the small hours of the morning, and sometimes made him drag a tired body out of a bed hardly warm, told upon him. The irregularity of his meals was even more dangerous to a finely-tempered constitution, and often he would go without food so long that he lost his appetite and satisfied it with a cigarette.

He became worn, restless, rather fretful. But the poison worked in him. He laughed bitterly as he described to me the daily disappointment and the insufferable conditions of his new life, yet when I suggested that he should break with it and get back to peace and a country school he confessed that Fleet Street had "got hold of him." Although he was angry when after a day's exciting work Vicary sent him off on an evening engagement, he was much more distressed if, as often happens in Fleet Street, he was compelled to spend a day or two in utter idleness. Other men, like Brandon and Codrington, enjoyed the spell of inactivity, smoking innumerable pipes or cigarettes, playing innumerable games of chess, reading novels or papers, and discussing with interminable arguments the influence of Meredith, the art of Oscar Wilde, the characteristics of Marie Corelli, the latest murder trial, or a new detective story. Frank being new to the system was worried by a day of do-nothing. He could not understand it. He became uneasy and ill-at-ease, and doubted whether he was earning his salary. He brought down books to the office, but found that he lost his taste for reading. He thought of writing something in his leisure hours, a novel, or some more essays for the *Spectator*. But he was unused to working in a

room where men were fighting duels with indiarubber bands on rulers, or practising the strangle-grip, or judo, or watching a chess-combat with a running fire of comment, sarcasm and impertinent advice. Sometimes when he had an evening alone in his rooms at Staple Inn he sat down before blank sheets of paper with the idea of writing something that would satisfy his desire of artistic expression, but the thought of the day's adventures prevented all concentration of mind, and he would find himself going back again and again to some new phase of life which had been revealed to him, to an interview with some public man or woman, or to office scenes in which he had played the part of onlooker.

That also worried him. Frank knew that his colleagues held aloof from him. They were polite, they were quite pleasant, but they made him feel that he was not one of them. He wondered why. He was almost weak in his desire to get their friendship and goodfellowship. He had a yearning to be on equal terms with them, and to be one of "the boys," as they called each other. But he was conscious that when he came into the room conversation which had been hilarious toned down a little, that a man telling a funny story with dramatic gestures concluded it in half tones. If he ventured some remark, in a hesitating way, there was a momentary pause before they answered it. Frank could not help seeing that these men, with one or two exceptions, looked upon him as a prig, as a fellow who gave himself superior airs. Yet in reality he had no feeling of superiority to these men. He was filled with a deep admiration for them, for the pluck, and high spirits and knowledge of the world, and splendid camaraderie among themselves.

The truth is that in spite of his humility and quiet good-humour the staff of the *Rag* knew that Frank Luttrell was different from them. Intuitively they knew him to be a

man who had ideals which they had long cast off but did not despise. They saw that he had a delicacy and refinement of spirit which unfitted him for the coarse texture of a life in Fleet Street. His handsome, sensitive face, the Oxford manner which he had not yet got rid of, his politeness and seriousness, made them feel slightly uncomfortable. They had been coarsened, and they were never polite. They insulted each other deliberately and brutally, knowing that their words would have no effect on a tough skin and would be accepted as a sign of good spirits. Cynicism had become a habit with them, and they felt uneasy in the presence of a colleague who winced when they discussed sacred subjects with light-hearted irreverence and flushed like a girl when they indulged in Rabelaisian humour. Yet they did not dislike Frank Luttrell. On the contrary they pitied him secretly, and were sorry when they saw how quickly he was being worn and torn by the condition of a career which to most of them had become a second nature. They had no illusions left. They, who had started with literary ambitions, had long ago abandoned them. They regarded everything as "part of the day's work," put up with its hardships, swore terrible oaths when the screw was too severe, but found a grim amusement even in their own most miserable experiences, and prided themselves on "playing the game." On the whole they found life amusing enough and took it laughing. Among themselves they discussed Frank Luttrell with curiosity, and found his psychology interesting.

"He is one of those fellows who will probably break his heart with disappointed ambition, fall in love with the wrong woman, lose his job at the end of a few years, and end his days in a lunatic asylum. They're no use to us in Fleet Street."

That was the cruel summing up of one of the reporters,

a middle-aged man named Braithwaite, who had once been the news-editor of a Conservative paper on £15 a week, and was now doing the law-courts for the Liberal organ on a third of that salary.

Brandon, the crime expert, had a different theory.

"Luttrell will probably kick the dust of Fleet Street off his shoes, go down to a cottage in Cornwall, and write a novel of a morbid character which will give delicious thrills to maiden ladies. . . . I like the boy. He is a sentimentalist and something of a mystic. He has almost a feminine gift of sympathy. We haven't enough of 'em now-a-days, and none at all down this alley, barring himself."

"I agree with Braithwaite regarding the love-story," said Codrington. "He is predestined to a hopeless passion. Melancholy grey-blue eyes like his are very appealing to women. Women always have soul-adventures with eyes like that, but in the end they generally marry a brute with optics like motor-goggles. That is why I am still a bachelor. Luttrell and I are in the same boat."

"Well, as long as you are not both after the same girl," said Braithwaite, with a rough guffaw.

Codrington flushed uneasily.

"You have no manners, Braithwaite."

Brandon and Codrington were the only men in the office with whom Luttrell became in any way intimate. They took him out with them occasionally to a Bohemian restaurant in Soho which seemed to be a rendezvous for pressmen. Luttrell found the conversation of these men over the table of an almost haunting interest to him. Both of them had had the strangest adventures. Both of them seemed to know life in the lowest haunts. Both of them seemed to be strangely familiar with thieves and detectives, and pugilists, and queer characters of the sporting world. In a language which was almost unintel-

ligible to Luttrell they described famous prize-fights and races where horses had been "pulled." They knew the history of crimes of which he had never heard, and told life-stories of law-breakers who for certain reasons had never been "lagged" by the police, though the evidence was clear against them. They seemed to have a familiar acquaintance with all the scandals of society, and entered into arguments about *causes célèbres* in which they knew the parties on either side. But often the conversation turned upon literature and drama, and to Luttrell's surprise he found that Brandon, who professionally seemed exclusively interested in crime, was a devoted admirer of Meredith, whose works he seemed to know by heart. He had an intimate knowledge of the mid-Victorian novelists and an almost religious reverence for Jane Austen, who he maintained was the greatest artist that had ever lived. Codrington was curiously inconsistent in his literary idolatry. He held up Sterne, Fielding, and Smollett as the models for all time and all ages, but in violent contrast idolised certain modern writers whom Brandon declared to be "decadent," and of whom Luttrell had to confess complete ignorance. Codrington had strange theories about literary art and life. He declared that life itself should be shaped according to literary ideals, and that every man should mould himself upon some type found in one of the great masterpieces. "The art of life," said Codrington, "is to adopt a pose, or, if you like to call it so, an ideal, and to be consistent in one's endeavor to make that pose so perfect that it becomes natural. For instance, Luttrell there should adopt the *David Copperfield* type, which of course is really Charles Dickens as a young man. He should wear his hair longer, and collars open at the throat, with a black stock round his neck. He should certainly wear straps to his trousers, and a tall hat with a rather curly brim. He has got all the rest inside

him: the sentiment, the serious ideals, the sensitiveness to environment, the facility for falling in love with the Dora type of woman, and the temperament which would make such a woman a torture to him if he ever marries."

"Thanks!" said Luttrell, rather taken aback by this fanciful analysis of his character. "If what you say is true, I will avoid that particular pose strenuously."

"My dear fellow," said Codrington, "you don't understand. You must be true to type. You must be artistic in the treatment of your own personality. If you avoid the right pose, you become a nonentity, or a bungled thing. Look at Martin Harvey; he would be nothing at all if some one had not told him that he was the living image of Sydney Carton in the *Tale of Two Cities* as drawn by Frank Barnard. He owes his whole success to the careful adaptation of his personality to that type."

"What is your type?" asked Luttrell.

"Ah!" said Codrington. He played with his seals for a moment, and then took a pinch of snuff out of a small enamelled box. "Study the eighteenth-century novelists; you will find me there."

Luttrell wanted to find the twentieth-century man behind his eighteenth-century mask. He wanted to know, with anxious curiosity, what was in the heart and brain of this tall, handsome fellow who behaved with such carefully-studied languor and elegance, who contrived to get even into his hastily-written "copy" a curious touch of old-fashioned pedantry, and quaint conceited little phrases which suggested an eighteenth-century essay in *The Gentleman's Magazine*... He wanted to know, above all things, what were his exact relations with Katherine Halstead, with whom he seemed always to be quarrelling in a mocking spirit, and yet to whom he behaved also with an underlying tenderness and gallantry. There was some secret understanding between them. They were often together.

He had met them walking slowly one night under the trees on the Embankment. Neither of them had seen the passer-by. But the passer-by, who was Frank Luttrell, had seen that Christopher Codrington, who had taken his hat off to let the breeze stir his pale gold hair, was smiling as he bent down to talk to the girl at his side, and that Katherine seemed to be angry with him. He heard only a few words as he passed and it was Katherine who spoke.

"You do not play the game, Chris," she said. "How can you expect me to be patient with you?"

Obviously there was some understanding or misunderstanding between them. As they had come into the room together one day at the office, Luttrell had seen Braithwaite wink at Brandon. Whenever anybody wanted to know where Codrington was they asked Katherine Halstead, and so they asked Codrington when they wanted Katherine. Luttrell was tempted to ask one of the men whether these two were engaged, but he could not summon up the courage to do so. For some reason he was afraid of what the answer might be. But he asked, one day, of Brandon, what Codrington was and had been. Brandon laughed. He had a habit of giving a curious low laugh when he wished to avoid a direct answer.

"Codrington's present began two years ago when he joined the *Rag*," he said. "Codrington's past is his own business, but has been the subject of rumour. Braithwaite says he was a music-hall singer in the Provinces. Birkenshaw says he is the son of a duke and has quarrelled with his father. You may take your choice."

Brandon himself was revealed to Frank in an unexpected way. He was always rather cold, always reserved regarding any fact about his private life, and Frank had been hurt more than once by the man's abruptness with him. He was astonished, therefore, one day when Bran-

Don invited him to supper at his flat near Battersea Park. "We can talk Meredith and Maeterlinck till we are tired," he said. And then he added in his abrupt way: "Don't come if you don't want to. For God's sake, don't be polite—that is what I hate."

"I shall be devilish glad to come," said Frank. "Barring Mother Hubbard's rooms, I have nowhere to go except to my own solitude in Staple Inn. Is it dress?"

"Dress!" said Brandon, snorting. "Oh, if you're one of that sort, you had better stay away. I only wear livery when I am on duty."

"I am not one of that sort," said Frank. "I am never happy out of a Norfolk jacket or my old college blazer."

"There are a lot of fools down my road," said Brandon, "who are so proud of wearing clean linen that they pull up the blinds, turn on the electric light, and show their shirt-fronts to the passers-by."

Frank spent a remarkable evening with Brandon. He lived on the fourth floor of a block of mansions facing Battersea Park. It was a good-sized flat, furnished in the barest style, but in good taste. On the wall of the room into which Brandon first led him were some etchings by Whistler and others, original character studies by Phil May, and a whole series of drawings by Aubrey Beardsley, all neatly framed in black. In the bookcases, to which Frank's eyes travelled at once, were some good editions of the English classics, including a fair selection of the poets, and numbers of French books on criminology, and a long row of detective stories in paper covers. This juxtaposition of poetry and the history of crime seemed to Frank startling in its incongruity.

Brandon was in an old brown suit, and had a pipe in his mouth. His rather massive, clean-shaven face seemed more than ever to be stamped by the impress of some tragic memory, and his habit of abruptness was exagger-

ated into something like actual rudeness. Frank felt horribly nervous, and wondered if he had been invited to be insulted. Then the door opened, and a woman came in, and Brandon said, "My wife."

The woman—she was almost a girl—was of remarkable beauty. She had mouse-coloured hair, an oval face with high cheek-bones and a long, bow-like mouth, the cheeks and the lips touched with carmine—by nature and not by the paint-brush—and a long white neck. But her eyes were most astonishing. They were large, and of the purest china-blue. She wore a green dress cut low at the throat, and without a waist, and as she came towards him, without the usual simpering welcome of the middle-class hostess, but gravely and rather timidly, Frank thought that one of Burne-Jones's dream-women must have come into the living flesh. And then she spoke, and if Frank had not been a gentleman by instinct as well as by breeding, he would have opened his eyes wider with amazement.

She spoke in the strongest Cockney dialect—not with the thin nasal twang of the half-cockney, but with the hoarse voice, the complete vowel-changes, of the East End coster-girl.

"It's dahnraht good of yer to come, Mr. Luttrell," she said earnestly, taking his hand, and holding it for a moment. "Bill 'ave horfen spoke abaht yer."

Frank bent over her hand with the reverence he always paid to women. He did not see that Brandon was watching him curiously, and that for a moment an expression of admiration, almost of tenderness, passed over his face.

"It is jolly good of you to have me, Mrs. Brandon," said Frank.

"Oh," said the beautiful woman in her hoarse voice, "yer didn't ought ter call me that! Mah nime is jest Peg to Bill's pals. Ain't he told yer abaht it?"

She looked swiftly over to the man who had called her his wife with an expression of appeal and surprise.

"No, Peg," said Brandon. "I haven't told him. . . . Is supper ready? We are both hungry."

"Yus," said the woman. "We've kep' it witing fur yer. I 'ope it won't 'ave spylt by nah."

"I am afraid I am rather late," said Frank. "I ought to have made my excuses before."

He spoke without a tremor in his voice and without a glance to show that he was excited by a great surprise, a surprise indeed amounting to an uncanny feeling that he was not in his right senses. Brandon had called her his wife, but she had said that her name was not Mrs. Brandon. She was surprised that he had not been told. Told what? What was this extraordinary mystery which associated Brandon with a woman who looked like one of Burne-Jones's dream-pictures, and who spoke like a Whitechapel flower-girl?

The dinner, or supper, as Brandon called it, was a curious episode. The mysterious "Peg" took the head of the table and served the meal. Once she passed a piece of bread to Brandon on the point of her knife, and once she used her knife to put some gravy into her mouth, but then, remembering some lesson, it seemed, laid it down quickly; looking across to Brandon with a mute appeal for forgiveness. Her eyes were always upon Brandon, watching him eat, quick to notice whether he had all he wanted, and waiting for a sign from him when she had to pass something to Frank or put the first plates on the sideboard. Whenever Frank spoke to her she had a timid, scared expression, and hesitated before she answered in her Cockney dialect. A change had come over Brandon. The abrupt manner in which he had welcomed his guest was now replaced by a geniality and friendliness. He seemed in better spirits than Frank

had ever seen him before, and the gloom on his face lifted. He told some of his latest adventures—queer and ghoulish stories of Irish “wakes” in the East End, of “freak” suicides, and of thieves’ kitchens, all of them touched by a grim humour which redeemed their tragedy and squalor. Once or twice he appealed to “Peg” upon some detail of custom or turn of a phrase in the low haunts of “down East,” and she answered with that seriousness which made her face so interesting in repose. But once when Brandon spoke of being away for three days in the following week, she gave a little cry of dismay, as though the thought of his absence was unendurable.

Brandon put his hand on hers above the table-cloth and said, “Why, Peg, three days will pass soon enough.”

The girl turned to Frank, and in the husky voice and accent which it is impossible to reproduce said that she dreaded Brandon, or “Bill,” as she called him, being away from her. She could do nothing but wander about the rooms. She could almost go mad sometimes, she said, when the night came and she found herself still lonely. It gave her the horrors. She thought the life of pressmen was very rough on their women.

“For men must work and women must weep,” said Brandon.

“Ah,” said the girl, “that’s po’try, ain’t it? It’s Gord’s truth, I *don’t* fink!”

“You shouldn’t say you don’t think, when you mean you do think, Peg,” said Brandon. He turned to Frank and said, quite simply, “It’s strange how Cockneys always say precisely the opposite to what they mean when they want to emphasise a statement. For instance ‘not arf’ means very much more than half—completely and utterly—and that is the key to the whole code of expression.”

This direct reference to the woman's uneducated speech was disconcerting to Luttrell, who said rather feebly that he "supposed so."

After the meal, the girl rose at a sign from Brandon, and disappeared from the room.

"We'll have a smoke and talk," said Brandon.

He threw over some cigarettes, but lit up a pipe himself, and puffed silently for a few moments. But the strange girl came back with coffee. Frank took a cup, and she crossed over to Brandon, and slipped down on her knees before him, as he took sugar and milk. A lady might have done the same thing to her husband without exciting remark. It was pretty and simple. But when it was done by this extraordinary coster-girl, it made Frank think of an oriental slave-girl with her lord and master.

When she had gone again Brandon opened the conversation by asking him how he liked Fleet Street life, and when Frank hesitated in reply, he said, "I know. You are having the devil of a time, of course. You are not cut out for such work."

"Oh, I like it," said Frank, quickly. "I find it extraordinarily fascinating."

"That's where the danger comes in," said Brandon. "Fellows like you—once upon a time I should have said fellows like me—get led onwards by the variety of the work, by its continual excitement, and because it brings one into touch all the time with new things. Then at forty years of age—I am thirty-nine, so I have another year!—one wakes up to find oneself staled. A touch of influenza, after a ride on an omnibus, late at night, puts one to bed for a week. And then one comes back to work, feeling less inclined to rush about, finding it more difficult to write quickly, more of an effort to get the right phrases, and the touches of spirit and style that make

the difference between a bright article and a dull one, and what happens next? . . . 'Oh, poor old Brandon,' says some one, 'is getting deuced dull.' 'It is time poor old Brandon got another job,' says some one else. And poor old Brandon gets a kind letter and three months' salary, and a dinner from the staff, and he goes into cheaper lodgings, and avoids his old pals or sponges on them, and picks up a few jobs here and there, and wonders how long it will be before the end comes."

"You all talk like that," said Luttrell—"every one of you till I get the creeps. And yet you all stay in the street. Not one of you will leave it when you have the chance."

"Quite true," said Brandon. "D'ye know Kipling's song?" He hummed it.

*"For to admire and for to see,
For to be'old this world so wide;
It never done no good to me,
But I can't drop it if I tried!"*

That was written by a journalist; that's the song of the wandering men with the wandering eyes."

So the conversation went on; Brandon giving his experiences of many papers and many editors. About editors he said that the course of modern journalism was the disappearance of the old-fashioned editor who was a politician and a man of literary taste, and the advent of the business man who had one eye on the circulation and the other on the advertisements. "Most of 'em are small men," he said, "who have worked their way into the editorial chair by intrigue and diplomacy and business ability of the ruthless cutting-down, cheese-paring, inhuman kind. They have a lot of small ideas and no big ones. They funk anything which goes against public opinion because they are afraid of reducing circulation, and the

leading article is controlled by the advertising department."

"Is it quite as bad as that all round?" said Luttrell.

"No. There are still a few exceptions. Precious few."

"How about Bellamy?" asked Luttrell.

Brandon smiled.

"Oh, Bellamy! . . . He'd be the first to admit he's not the Heaven-born editor. But he's a gallant little man and a good pal in private life. He has still kept some humanity about him, and he has got a strong call on the loyalty of the staff. . . . He's facing a tough job, too. What with the proprietor—a weak, well-meaning man who is losing more money than he likes—on the one side, and a little gang of incompetent blighters not a thousand miles away, he has to move warily. God knows what will be the end of it."

Luttrell was interested, but all the time his thoughts kept going back to the girl with the Burne-Jones face. Perhaps Brandon knew what was in his mind, for presently, as though in answer to Luttrell's thoughts, he said abruptly—

"I suppose you are wondering about Peg?"

"I have no right to wonder," said Frank, colouring up in spite of his effort to appear unembarrassed.

Brandon drew his chair close to the fire, and picked up a poker. For a few moments he stared into the flames, and the old look of tragic reminiscence crept into his face again.

"You have a right to know. I asked you here . . . I should be glad if you would look after Peg sometimes when I go away."

He laughed in a low voice.

"I dare say you think you have got into a mad-house, or something. Peg is startling, I know. . . . But anyhow——" He spoke with a sudden enthusiasm—"You

are a brick, Luttrell. You are a gentleman to the bone, old man. . . . You didn't let Peg see by the flicker of an eyelid that you were amazed by her way of speech. You behaved as though she were a duchess all the time. I admired you for that."

In a simple, straightforward way he told Frank an extraordinary story, that was partly a confession, partly a defence. While it was being told, Frank lent forward, staring into the fire, as Brandon stared into it; and beads of sweat broke out upon his forehead, and once he drew a long quivering breath. All of that story need not be told here—the story of a young man who, with a restless spirit, and an insatiable curiosity for life, finds himself an adventurer in London, lonely and needing intimate companionship. He found that companionship in Queer Street, amongst men and women who had no law of life but that which bade them seize on any fleeting pleasure, and satisfy any passing passion, regardless of the price. Brandon had plunged into this life recklessly, and had lived a few wild years, without a thought that one day he, too, would have to pay the price; the price of his own wild oats—the most expensive grain in life's harvest—and the price of one woman's ruined soul. The woman had died as most of her class die, and Brandon found upon his doormat a letter written by the hand which was stiff and cold. The words in it burnt into his brain like red-hot irons, and seared him with the brand of shame. For months those words rang into his ears wildly, accusingly, until he was nearly tortured into madness. All the time he was doing his daily work, reporting murder-trials, describing charity bazaars when there were no murders, and summarising Blue Books. By sheer will-power he kept sane, and no one knew that he had been in Hell.

Then, one day he met Peg. He met her in a police-

court where she was giving evidence against a man who had tried to murder her, and who had succeeded within an eighth of an inch. His knife had glanced upon her corset, and missed her heart. The evidence was dragged out of the girl, and, after weeping bitterly in the dock, she swooned when she was hissed by the low-class crowd in court who hate a woman for "giving away" her man. The man was sentenced to twelve years' penal servitude for attempted murder, and he left the dock cursing and blaspheming. The girl slipped out of the court by a side way; but the crowd recognised her down a side street and would have torn her to bits, if Brandon had not been there. Putting his arm round her, he had fought his way through the mob of evil men and loose women, and then, with the assistance of the police who now came upon the scene, put her half fainting into a cab. He drove home with her to the flat in Battersea Park; and on that journey, while with closed eyes she lay with her head upon his shoulder, he vowed that he would try to rescue this girl from her awful life, on account of that other woman whom he had helped to ruin. Peg had been very ill, and with the aid of an old charwoman he nursed her back to health. She repaid him by a slave-like love. She would have let him trample on her, and would have kissed his feet. She would have let him beat her, and she would have kissed the whip. For the first time in her life, she believed that one man in the world was good and kind, and the revelation was like a miracle that had lifted her up among women and restored her purity and grace. Brandon wanted to marry her, but she believed that she had been married one day to a man who had left her on the next. Then she had fallen upon her knees and had put her arms round him, and had wept passionately with her head bowed down almost to the ground before him, beseeching him not to

ruin his life by taking up "with the likes of her," and to allow her to go out again into the streets. But Brandon said, "Stay with me, Peg;" and his will and her love had prevailed over her desire for sacrifice. Wild bird, bred in the lowest haunts of life, with horrible memories that came to her in the darkness and made her shriek, she was only happy when Brandon was with her. Without him, as she had to be many times, she moped and pined and—Brandon spoke the words in a low voice—sometimes he came back to find that she had found temporary solace in the worst of ways—in drink.

"That is my story, Luttrell," said Brandon.

Frank was silent. He was profoundly moved by this narrative in which Brandon had deliberately unlocked the mystery of his life.

"Why do you tell me these things?" he said presently.

"Perhaps there is a moral in them," said Brandon, "anyhow, a warning."

"How long has the girl been with you?"

"Only two months." Brandon got up and put his hand affectionately on Frank's shoulder.

"I haven't told another living soul," he said. "Somehow I wanted you to know. You won't go talking about it among the other fellows."

Later in the evening the two men went into the next room. Peg was there sitting on the floor with a book on her lap. It was Hans Andersen's *Fairy Tales*. She rose when they entered, and went swiftly over to Brandon, putting her hand on his arm.

"I'm that glad you've come," she said. "These tales give me the fair 'ump. They make me want ter cry."

She sat with her head against Brandon's knee, and he told more stories about the things he had seen. Then Frank took his leave, and on the landing he promised his friend that he would call on Peg now and again, if

possible, when she was left alone in the flat while Brandon was away.

"I would not ask any one else," said Brandon. "But I can trust you, and call on your good nature. You have got the gift of sympathy."

The two men shook hands, with a grip that meant more than words; and Luttrell, on his swinging walk from Battersea Park to Holborn, lived again in imagination through every detail of this extraordinary evening. Robert Louis Stevenson had not conceived anything stranger in his *New Arabian Nights* than this episode with the coster-girl and the remorseful journalist. Like Luttrell's adventure with the countess, it all seemed to be a mad dream. Brandon had said there was a moral in it. But Frank, trying to find the logic of it, thought the moral was rather muddled, as often happened in life, it seemed.

CHAPTER IX

THERE was one place in London where Frank Luttrell spent many of his evenings when he was not doing late duty for the *Rag*. It was the flat on the third floor of the bookseller's shop in Shaftesbury Avenue where the names of Margaret Hubbard and Katherine Halstead were written on the brass plate. "Mother Hubbard" had given him a general invitation. "If ever you want to toast your toes before somebody else's fire," she said, "remember that we always burn the best coal." Frank found that it was absurdly easy to invent excuses for turning in the direction of Shaftesbury Avenue any time after seven o'clock. Margaret Hubbard one day expressed a wish to read Maeterlinck's *Life of the Bee*. Frank was under the impression that he had it on his shelves in Staple Inn. He was quite mistaken, but he found it in the shop under Mother Hubbard's own rooms, bought it for three-and-sixpence, wrote his name in it, and a date that went two years back, opened it violently in several places, dog-eared three of the pages, and then went upstairs with it.

"It looks remarkably clean," said Margaret Hubbard, eyeing him suspiciously.

"Yes," said Frank, "I always take care of my books. Good books ought to be treated with respect."

At another time he found that he had a great desire to read one of G. K. Chesterton's paradoxical philosophies which he had seen on Margaret Hubbard's work-table.

"Could you spare it for a day or two?" he said, keeping

his hat in his hand as though he could not stay more than a minute.

"Of course," said Mother Hubbard, "and I am sorry you have not yet found where we keep the hat-rack."

It was half-past seven, and he stayed till eleven.

Having discovered that both Margaret and Katherine were fond of flowers, he became wonderfully benevolent towards a flower-girl in the Strand who—so he said—kept a drunken mother and a consumptive sister. More than once or twice he went without tea—his income was not adapted to philanthropy—in order to buy market bunches of chrysanthemums and violets.

"It would be a charity if you would give these things the hospitality of your rooms and a little water," he said when he brought them to the door of the flat. "Polly looks on me as a regular customer, and I haven't the heart to disappoint her."

"Your heart is a bit too big for your body, young man," said Mother Hubbard severely. "What you want is a little less heart and a bit more head. You have no business to throw your money away like this."

But her severity was softened by the sight of the flowers which she adored, and Frank thought himself well rewarded when Katherine, who refused to do any dusting, but regarded the arrangement of flowers as her special province, put them into vases, with many ejaculations of pride in her own good taste. She would stand back from a blue-china pot into which she had put the tall flowers, and with her head on one side, say, "How's that for a chaste effect?" And Frank would say, "It couldn't be more charming," or, with a little insincere criticism, "Don't you think that fellow on the offside wants a shorter stalk?"

Then Frank found that his education had been frightfully neglected on the subject of chess. At the office

the men fought pitched battles while waiting for assignments; and it seemed to him that, as a journalist, it was his bounden duty to learn the royal and ancient game. Did Miss Halstead think she could have the patience, and spare the time, to teach such a duffer as himself? Miss Halstead, with a queer little laugh, said that she would initiate him into the mysteries free of charge. That was always a good reason for wending his way to Shaftesbury Avenue after a day's work. He vowed both to Katherine and Margaret Hubbard that there never had been and never would be such a glorious game. He could not imagine how the dickens he had lived so long without learning it.

"Well, you don't seem very quick at it even now," said Mother Hubbard, with her usual candour. "The way in which Katherine always beats you—and she is a perfect muff at it—is simply scandalous."

"I almost believe he lets me win on purpose," said Katherine; and then, as if the thought had just struck her, she flushed up to the eyes and said, "If I really thought that I would not play another game."

Frank was scared, and by a masterly series of moves which broke down her defence, beat her handsomely in two minutes.

Mother Hubbard was watching.

"My word!" she said. "This young man is not so innocent as he makes out. I believe he is an old hand at the game!"

"Good lord," said Frank, with extreme uneasiness. "What on earth makes you think that?"

"Look here," said Katherine, leaning over the board with her elbows on the table and her face in her hands, staring at Frank with a penetrating gaze, "have you been playing a game with me all this time?"

Frank looked almost too innocent. "Yes," he said. "Chess . . . and a jolly game it is, too."

He blundered atrociously in the next contest and restored the balance of things, and afterwards by a curious coincidence Katherine and he won almost alternately.

He could not afford to be quite honest. He dared not confess that he had played chess with his father since he was ten years old until the Rector had said, "Look here, my boy, I thought I could stand against any chess-player in England, but you are my master." If he had said such a thing, he would have been committing moral and intellectual suicide, for it would have put an end to his greatest happiness in life. It was a blessed thing to sit in Mother Hubbard's rooms of an evening, at a little bamboo table, with the red and white ivories under his nose, and with Katherine on the other side, not more than a foot away, with the fragrance of her hair as an incense to his spirit, with her pretty face to look at and learn by heart while he waited for her to move, with her eyes sparkling at him when she caught him in a trap which he had carefully prepared for himself. How prettily and patiently she had taught him the moves, which he found so difficult to learn! How ingeniously and cleverly she had demonstrated the first problems of opening and attack! How excited she had been when, after a dozen lessons, he was at last able to hold his own without calling for the charitable advice of his opponent! Such a pleasure was not to be spoilt by confession or contrition. Besides, she would never forgive him, if she once found out his double-dealing.

Those games of chess, and those visits with flowers and books, did not take place every night, or every week. There were many interruptions between them, and sometimes a fortnight passed before Frank Luttrell could again press the bell-knob of the flat over the bookseller's

shop, and see the two names written in letters of gold on the door and on his heart. He had now gained a more secure foothold on the *Rag*, and was no longer the raw recruit. Vicary had bullied him for his article on William Trevelyan Bendall—"when you are told to be funny," he said, "don't try and do the tragedy turn"; but Frank had heard afterwards through Brandon that both Bellamy and Vicary had been impressed by the grim power and satire of that sketch. So Vicary kept him busy now, and he was getting accustomed to the thrill of excitement of seeing his "copy" in type, and to the disgust and disappointment of finding his carefully-thought-out phrases mauled by sub-editors, or turned into absurdity by printers' errors. Night after night, he was rushing about London in cabs and omnibuses and underground tubes, trying to track down some elusive notoriety, or travelling to some provincial town to describe a curious scene or to interview an eccentric person. Bellamy "the great Chief," as he was called, had put in a word for him with Vicary. "That new boy of ours has got the descriptive touch. He keeps his eyes open. Give him his chance." This had come to Luttrell's ears through Katherine Halstead by way of Quin, to whom Vicary had repeated them.

"My word!" said Katherine, "it isn't every new man who gets his chance so quickly. You have no idea how glad I am." It was Katherine's gladness as well as Bellamy's praise which put new heart into Luttrell, and made him try his hardest. He was sent on the strangest "turns," as they were called. He had to describe a wedding between an old man of ninety-two and an old woman of ninety, and the funeral of a clown who had made the public laugh until their sides ached for thirty years, and then blew out his brains in an attack of melancholia and was followed to the grave by circus men and women

from all parts of the country—the strangest collection of human beings whom Luttrell had ever seen. He had to take the news of a man's arrest on a charge of murder to a wife who was giving an "At-Home" in a suburban house. He could never forget the look of horror, nor her cry of anguish, nor his own deep shame at having to do such work in the interests of sensational journalism. He had to spend a night in a "tuppenny doss," where he lay awake for hours in a cold sweat, listening to the breathing, the occasional moans, the restlessness of men eaten by vermin, the horrible snoring, the sudden shriek of terror as a boy woke out of a nightmare, the fight for breath of asthmatical old men, in that dark dormitory where five hundred human beings lay in box-beds like coffins. He had to go behind the scenes of a pantomime, and stand crushed against the prompter's box, while crowds of pretty girls and coarse fat women in tights thrust past him on to the stage and then came surging back, with giggles and whispered ejaculations; and when the lights went out, and the scenery was changed, one of the women had put her hand on his arm and said, "Oh my, here's a pretty boy who looks as if he had lost his mother. Won't you invite us to supper, dearie, after the show?" Frank had excused himself. He felt horribly ill-at-ease among a crowd of giggling young women, who wore very little clothing, and stared at him with saucy eyes. He had to write a sketch of a Christmas party given by the Salvation Army in Eagle Street, Drury Lane, where the children of thieves, murderers, "out-of-works" and "unemployables" fought, tooth and nail, for buns and crackers, and ate the feast provided for them with the ravenous hunger of wild animals. A week later he described the Fancy Dress Ball at the Mansion House, where the children of the well-to-do showed off with self-consciousness and vanity, flirted like little men and women, and toyed

with jellies and trifles, without appetites. Perhaps the strangest work he was called upon to do was to take a party of four people—two men and two women—across the Channel and back, to test an alleged cure for seasickness. One of the men had been horribly ill each time. He was suppressed in Frank's article by a sub-editor, who thought he spoilt the effect of the story. Frank Luttrell had read the Greek and Latin poets, he had had literary aspirations, he had written articles for the *Spectator*, and sometimes he laughed, not in a pleasant, happy way, at the thought of having to turn out these ridiculous articles, at the utter lack of dignity in his work, at the wear and tear of the body and spirit. "I am prostituting my pen," he said to himself, and then another small voice said, "I am seeing a lot of human nature. It's all right as long as I keep a sense of humour, and don't take myself seriously. It is all right as long as Katherine Halstead works on the *Rag*, and plays chess with me in Shaftesbury Avenue."

But Katherine Halstead was not always at Shaftesbury Avenue to play chess with him. She too, as a journalist, had many evening engagements, and if he stayed late enough, talking alone with Margaret Hubbard, who seemed glad to have him, he would see her come in so tired that she would drop into a chair and implore Mother Hubbard to take off her hat and give her, as she said, "the cup that cheers but does not inebriate." Once she said, quite seriously—giving Frank a sudden cold shiver—"I'm not sure if I would not prefer the cup that *does* inebriate. Oh, after a meeting of the Mothers' Union at the Albert Hall I feel very much inclined to get really drunk! Bishops always have that effect on me."

Frank did not wonder at Margaret Hubbard's nickname, when he saw how she waited on Katherine at those times, chafing her cold hands, getting tea for her

in a twinkling, and uncoiling the girl's hair to soothe her aching head. Katherine accepted it all as a matter of course. She seemed to regard Mother Hubbard as her own private and special providence. Frank thanked Heaven with real piety that he should have been permitted into the intimacy of these two women's lives. It was all a revelation to him, something new and strange and delightful. As a sisterless man, he had never before seen a woman uncoil her hair, and it gave him a curious thrill of pleasure. He had never before seen a girl slip on to the floor, snuggling her head into the lap of another girl, and smoking a cigarette in front of the fire, in dreamy enjoyment. He felt that this experience was good for him. If he had asked other people's advice on the subject they might not have been so sure.

These were the evenings when he was left alone with Mother Hubbard. Chris Codrington was in the way of getting stalls for theatres, and invited Katherine to join him. Sometimes she refused—that was generally when Frank Luttrell had promised to go round for a game of chess—but several times when Frank had expected an evening engagement she consented to go. Luttrell arrived one evening when she was getting ready and she came into the room in her evening gown of white silk, cut low at the throat, and with a rose in her hair.

She curtsied before him, sitting in the middle of her billowing skirt, like a picture by Brock in one of Jane Austen's books.

"Oh," said Frank, "you are beautiful. You are like Cinderella going to the ball."

Katherine blushed very prettily.

"Your Royal Highness is pleased to flatter me."

She rose in her billowing gown and stood, a graceful and slender figure, before him.

"For that nice compliment you shall be privileged to

do up my glove. I remember you said you wanted practice."

"Oh, rather!" said Frank, and he held her arm again and bent over it. She gave him a little silver buttonhook, and he found the task almost too easy. Then Codrington came in, very handsome in his evening clothes, and Luttrell envied him, with an almost sickening envy. He could almost find it in his heart to hate that man, who assumed a kind of proprietorship over Katherine Halstead, and who was going to spend a whole evening alone with her, with the right of a courtier to hold her cloak, to sit down by her side in a hansom cab, to have her face close to him as they whispered comments on the play. He could see all those things vividly, and each mental picture was a pain to him. He had never forgotten that evening when, after Mother Hubbard's birthday party, Codrington touched Katherine's cheek with his lips. The memory of it came to him again and again—in railway trains, on the top of omnibuses, in London slums, at public meetings. By degrees he had tried to forget it, or, remembering, had persuaded himself, insincerely, that the kiss had not been a sign of anything but comradeship. Katherine was not to be judged like other girls. She was a journalist who lived among men and worked among them. No doubt she and Codrington had known each other for years. No doubt they had confided little secrets to one another, and had become almost like brother and sister. He was absurd to be so sensitive, so damnably—jealous. Jealous! As the word framed itself in his mind he raised his head in a startled way, and then a wave of colour swept swiftly into his face. In that moment something had been revealed to Luttrell, explaining many things which he had not yet understood.

I think it was that revelation which prevented him from going quite so often to the third floor of the book-

seller's shop in Shaftesbury Avenue. If he had any inkling that Codrington was to be there, he stayed away. And sometimes, even when Katherine had been alone with Margaret Hubbard, and he had gone to the flat, unable to keep away any longer, he would plead a letter to write, or some other business, and leave so early that both Katherine and Margaret cried out upon him. The truth is that sometimes he found Katherine's company too exciting. She had little characteristics, which, utterly unknown to herself, troubled him, and made him feel that he was not quite master of his emotions. She would put her hand on his for a moment, when she came in tired and he waited on her. She had a habit of laughing into his eyes when she quizzed him for being too serious or too sensitive. Once, when she was looking at a picture—one of Pinger's sketches—on the wall, she put her face against his shoulder, and said he was a nice tall thing to lean against when her head ached. Then she would sit on the floor with her hands clasped round her knees staring into the fire, and command Frank peremptorily to tell her about his boyhood in the old Rectory, and about his mother, of whom he had sometimes spoken in a way that pleased her. All this was very innocent, very simple, very charming to a man who, if he had not been in this flat, would have been alone in his own room, or trudging the streets of London.

But it was so novel to him, and surprising, that he felt sometimes that he must go for a long lonely walk to cool his head and steady his pulse. It was at those times that he pleaded letter-writing, not untruthfully, for on the way to Kennington Oval, or Peckham Rye, or Clapham Junction, or some other place to which his long legs led him, he composed mile-long letters to Katherine Halstead which he posted in the red letter-box of his heart.

I fancy some of these letters must have reached the

"addressee," as the Post Office guide would say. Once after Frank had left the flat early and was half-way down the Waterloo Road, Katherine suddenly called out, "My ears are burning like Billy-o, Mother Hubbard! Somebody is thinking of me."

"Now I wonder who that can be?" said Margaret Hubbard, looking across at her with an innocent expression which was not quite natural

This time Katherine's cheeks began to burn, as well as her ears, and she said, rather hastily, "You are an absurd Mother Hubbard, sometimes, aren't you, my dear?"

On the evenings when Frank found himself alone with Margaret, he felt no such emotional excitement as when Katherine was there. There was something very restful in the mere presence of that woman of thirty-six. She had the gift of silence as well as of sympathy. Often these two would sit for an hour or more without speaking a word, Margaret Hubbard doing her crochet or reading a book, Frank deep in a chair with his hands behind his head and his long legs stuck out, staring at the fire. Sometimes Margaret would turn her eyes towards him and look at the boyish, good-looking head, with its keen, delicate profile upon which the firelight flickered; and at such times her face softened, and into her eyes crept the look of motherhood which had, perhaps, suggested her charming nickname to someone who had seen it. Once or twice at such times, during recent days, she gave a quiet sigh. Perhaps she could not have explained to herself why the sight of that sensitive, silent boy in the room stirred some chord in her heart, and awakened an old melody that was melancholy-sweet in its cadences.

Into the silence of the room came the murmurous sound of the traffic in the streets, the tinkling of cabbells passing down Shaftesbury Avenue, the sharp click-clack of horses' hoofs on hard asphalt, the swishing

noise of rain beating down on the pavement below, and the rattling tune of a piano-organ coming faintly through the distance. In such a softly-lighted room in London, in such a quietude after a day's work, with the noise of humanity heard from afar, a man and woman, alone together, are drawn close; without words they understand, and, if they speak, it is sometimes to confide the secret things of the heart, which in daylight, or in another environment, would not be revealed. It is at such times that spiritual friendships are made, not always without danger. Many a man has found himself in the court where a golden anchor hangs above the seat of justice—not a symbol of hope—because he has sat too many evenings with a woman, staring at the fire in a quiet room, and listening to the tinkling cab-bells in the street below, and telling those secret things of the heart, which he had hidden from all others. In Frank's case there was no danger, to himself, but a source of strength and consolation in those quiet hours.

He often spoke to Margaret Hubbard about his boyhood, as though it were a far distant thing from which he was divided by a wide gulf of years; and in his boyish way, which showed that it was not so far distant after all, he told her how much he had suffered from being born with an incurable shyness and sensitiveness, which had locked him up in loneliness, away from his fellow-creatures, and had caused him real torture when, as now, he had to face the world, and plunge into an active life of small adventures in which a brazen face is essential for success. In answer to these confidences, Margaret Hubbard, who understood, gave him sane and wise advice, and comforted him with words of brave spirit, telling him to be patient and plucky, and if he suffered, as he still must, to hide it, and force himself not to falter. Then he spoke of his father and mother, making

word-portraits of them, idealised no doubt, and touched with tenderness, but yet showing the little weaknesses, the absent-mindedness, the intensely reserved nature of the country rector, and the highly-strung spirit and occasional rebelliousness of the mother whose imagination had been shut in by a narrow life.

"I should love to know your mother," said Margaret Hubbard. "She must be a good and beautiful woman." And Frank said, "Yes, I am sure you two would understand each other. She often writes about you in answer to my letters."

From Margaret he learnt some of the things he wanted to know about herself and Katherine. In Fleet Street he had met many new people, and it always seemed to him that they could be only half known because they seldom spoke of their early life. It was like beginning a novel at the middle chapter, or reading one of those modern novels which plunge straight into the middle of a plot without explaining the precedents of their characters. He was glad to know, therefore, from Margaret Hubbard why she and Katherine Halstead lived in a flat over a bookseller's shop in Shaftesbury Avenue, what chain of facts had led both these women to the big room filled with second-hand furniture, where now, as a new link in their chain of life, he sat with his hands behind his head.

Margaret told her story not all at one time, but giving little glimpses of her past as some casual word reminded her of them. She had been to Girton, but had not taken her degree. She had been to Cheltenham, and had been captain of the hockey team, when a hockey girl was as much ridiculed in the comic papers as a militant suffragette of more recent times. She was the daughter of an army man—yes, the same Hubbard who defended the pass against the Afghans in '83—a gallant man to the

last, who fought a more terrible enemy than the fuzzy-wuzzie with a stoic courage. He died of cancer, and Margaret Hubbard nursed him single-handed, learning the two great lessons of courage and death. Her mother had died when she was a child; and, when the Colonel went, she was left alone, receiving the cold charity of rich cousins. Of course, she was proud. A soldier's daughter is always proud. She had quarrelled violently with the cousins, and had become the governess of a newspaper proprietor's children. Three months later, she started as a woman journalist at two pounds a week, on the paper which belonged to the man who had played at bears with her one day among a nursery full of children, and had then given her the great chance. Oh, she had had a rough time like most of them. The proprietor had sold his paper, and she had been the first to go, under the new régime. She knew what it was to be hungry, really hungry. Then she had got on to another paper, where the news-editor had constantly insulted her, and had almost broken her spirit. But, one day when he swore at her with a coarse oath, the old Colonel's heart leapt into her, and she knocked the man down with his own office ruler. The old hockey training was useful. She had a strong arm, and the man went down like a ninepin. Very wicked of her, no doubt, but rather glorious!

Margaret Hubbard laughed at the thought of it, and felt her muscles again. "They're a bit flabby," she said, regretfully. Of course, she had been dismissed. The editor thought it might be his turn next, although he was rather glad that his subordinate had been "outed." Another fearful struggle with poverty, another billet on another newspaper, another dismissal—this time for refusing to puff a poisonous wretch who called herself a "beauty-doctor" and who spent large sums in advertise-

ments, until the police got upon her track. She had been on two other papers, doing ordinary reporters' work, attending meetings, rushing and scurrying about to bazaars and society weddings, learning a lot about fools and knaves, wearing herself to skin and bones, but getting as much fun out of the life as she could, making, oh, ever so many friends among "the boys," who had all been good to her. And now, for a time, she had got into a more or less peaceful sanctuary, as fashion editor on the *Rag*. Bellamy was very good to her. He remembered that, once on a time, they had done "turns" together on rival Rags with good comradeship before he had come into his kingdom.

"How long it will last, of course, remains to be seen," she said.

"Why should it not last?" said Frank. "At least, Bellamy will never act the part of a cad."

"Oh, I can trust little Silas," said Margaret Hubbard; "but in Fleet Street things never stand still. The spirit of change is its law of life."

Katherine's history did not go back so far. She had only been in Fleet Street two years, and this was her first paper. She was the daughter of a barrister—Hilary Halstead, the brilliant K.C., who, after starving without briefs for ten years, while his poor frivolous little wife had fretted for pretty frocks and the luxuries to which she had been accustomed in her girlhood, burst into fame and fortune by his defence of Kitty Verlaine, accused of poisoning her husband. Just when Mrs. Halstead could have had as many pretty frocks as her heart desired, she was taken away to the land where frocks, it is said, are not worn. Halstead, left a widower with a tiny girl who was her mother in miniature, worked feverishly, and—unfortunately—played feverishly when he was not working. A man of irresistible charm, he was the leader

of the sporting coterie in London Society, which revived the old gambling traditions of the Georgian period, playing for high stakes at bridge, and making big books on the turf. Halstead's luck was villainous; and the high fees which he received for his briefs were seldom enough to pay his debts. The excitement of his life wore him out, and he followed his wife when Katherine was only twelve, leaving her penniless. She was adopted by an aunt who wrote regularly for the *Family Herald* and the *Girl's Own Paper*, a kind, sentimental old maid who, like early-Victorian ladies, kept a bundle of love-letters tied up in blue silk which she watered with her tears on the anniversary of the death of a young officer who had been killed in a war in India thirty years ago. With this aunt Katherine had led a dull, "genteel," rather self-absorbed life in Royal Avenue, Chelsea, reading omnivorously, dominating the maiden lady and the faithful maid-servant, both of whom waited on her hand and foot, doing their best to spoil her, and not hiding from her their conviction that she was the most beautiful and the most talented young person in the world.

Katherine had not been spoilt. From her father she had inherited a good and a gay heart, and a keen sense of humour which preserved her mental balance. From the books which she read without guidance or hindrance, she had acquired a great deal of useful knowledge outside the range of an ordinary high-school education, and a good many false ideas about men and women and life, and a strangely-concocted religion of her own—which troubled her aunt, who was a High Church-woman—in which pluck, sentiment, and the boyish code of "playing the game" were the chief ingredients. At nineteen years of age she walked into a newspaper office, and demanded to see the editor. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, the editor was passing the in-

qu岸 office when she asked for him, and, seeing a pretty girl's face, thought that it might offer him an agreeable five minutes between interviews with two men whom he was going to dismiss for premature old age and overgrown salaries. Katherine was very rude to him when he told her, a little brutally no doubt, some plain truths about school-girls applying for positions on great London newspapers. She said that she was surprised that the editor of a great London newspaper did not know how to behave like a gentleman. The editor sat back in his chair and laughed heartily. He had never been spoken to like that in his life. He rather liked it for its novelty. After some further conversation, in which Katherine attempted to persuade him that she could do anything he wanted from writing a leading article to a serial story, she put her hand on his arm and said, "Now, you will be good, won't you? Because I am not going to leave this room until you put me on to the staff."

Then he had spoken to her rather seriously, and told her what Fleet Street meant to a girl, and how utterly ignorant she was of everything that would make her useful as a journalist. Upon this Katherine burst into tears, and the editor, who had hammered many men in the course of his career, walked up and down the room wondering what he could do for this extraordinary young creature whose tearful eyes were so full of disappointment and reproach.

"Look here," he said, "if you come to me in two years' time, with a knowledge of shorthand, and if you promise not to shed tears on my blotting-paper, I will give you something to do."

"Is that a bargain?" said Katherine, radiantlly.

"Yes," said the editor, who was Silas Bellamy, sitting in another chair in another office.

"Well, if you don't mind, I'll have it in black and white," said the girl.

Bellamy was startled. He began to think that this young person was not so young as she looked. He drafted out an agreement for her on the lines laid down, with a great deal of solemnity which he found quite amusing. Then he signed the document, and handed it to her.

"Don't you go showing that about," he said, "or my reputation will be blasted."

"No one shall see it until I come here in two years' time," she said.

"I don't believe you will come," said Bellamy. "You'll be engaged to a nice boy long before that."

"Perhaps," said Katherine. "Perhaps not. Anyhow, I am very much obliged to you. Good-morning, Mr. Bellamy."

She shook hands with him, and he escorted her very politely to the door. Here she looked back for a moment, and said, "I am sorry I said you did not know how to behave like a gentleman. That was quite rude of me, and it was utterly untrue."

"You relieve my mind infinitely," said Bellamy. "Thanks so much."

During the two years that passed Bellamy forgot all about that visit, until one day he received a lady's card and a letter marked "Private." The name on the card was unknown to him, except that it stirred some vague memory; but on opening the envelope he saw the half sheet of note-paper with a three-line agreement signed by himself. Then he remembered, and laughed quietly to himself again and again as he stared at the piece of paper.

When Katherine Halstead was shown in he was almost serious.

"So you have not got engaged to a nice boy?" he asked.

"No," said Katherine. "I couldn't find one. So I learnt shorthand. I can do it verbatim—here's my certificate if you don't believe me."

"Oh, I do," said Bellamy.

"And here are some of my cuttings. You will see I have had articles on all sorts of subjects in all sorts of papers."

Bellamy read them for ten minutes while Katherine had tea, which he ordered for her.

Then he looked up and said, "This is all very well—quite nice and bright—but that agreement of ours was rather loosely drawn up. It referred to a position on this paper. Isn't that so?"

"Yes," said Katherine. "Why not?"

"Well," said Bellamy, "I don't mind telling you in confidence—I know you won't repeat it—that I am changing over to the other side of the street. I am going to control another paper. So, you see, this agreement doesn't apply. I'm sorry. . . . Have you finished your tea?"

For one moment Katherine stared at him in a serious, searching way, which made him a little uneasy. Then she said, "Is that playing the game, do you think?"

"Oh, if you put it like that——" said Bellamy. Then he laughed and said, "My dear child, I don't want to evade a solemn compact by legal hair-splitting. You are quite right, and I'll be hanged if I don't fulfill the bond . . . although I am perfectly sure I shall regret the little joke to my dying day."

"Oh, I don't think so," said Katherine, melting. "I'll do my very best. I promise I will!"

So that was how Katherine came to Fleet Street, and how she fell into the company of Margaret Hubbard, and

how after the death of the maiden aunt she shared rooms with this good friend in Shaftesbury Avenue.

Margaret Hubbard told the story with delightful humour, and Frank treasured it in his heart. It was late one evening when the tale was told, and the fire had burned dim, and the kettle which was waiting for Katherine's return from another gala night—foreign kings were coming to London too frequently—had gone off the boil. Frank and Margaret were sitting on each side of the fire, and their quiet laughter had made a merry duet. Then Margaret became serious, and said rather sadly—

"Poor Kitty! Poor little bird! She ought never to have come into such a life. I am sometimes afraid——"

"Of what?" said Frank.

Margaret Hubbard did not answer his question directly, but she leant forward with her hands in her lap.

"Oh," she said, "there is so much danger of professional women missing the good things of life—the only things that matter. I am not one of the old-fashioned 'women at home' dogmatists. The laws of social economy, and their very nature, force some women to go out and work, and the world is all the better for it. But, somehow or other, women have to pay a heavy price for liberty . . . some of them. They lose caste. Oh yes; I have felt that many times. Also, they lose their femininity—horrid, detestable word; and, because they see and know and say and do things which are outside the range of the domestic woman's knowledge, they are despised, perhaps a little feared . . . by men as well as women. And that is apt to make us bitter and rather hard. Because, you see—perhaps you don't—that, though we lose our femininity, we keep our womanhood. We are still women, with the desires and dreams of womanhood. It is curious how the professional woman, meeting many

men, working among them, goods friends with them, is so often left solitary. The boys who have sat in her rooms go away one by one and marry—other women. They have given her their confidences, have been glad in their time of her comradeship, but other girls—the feminine girls—get their hearts. Oh, it is not good to grow old alone . . . and sometimes I think that Kitty may be passed over in the same way, and that all her beauty will gradually fade, that all her bright spirits will wither, and that all the promise of her womanhood will bear no fruit—but disappointment and the dry husks of hope.”

As though ashamed of having said too much, and revealed herself too nakedly to him, a wave of colour swept into her face and she said, “Forgive me, Frank. I did not mean to speak these things.”

Frank was startled and extraordinarily moved.

He leant forward and put his head on her own, big, beautiful hand—a working hand—and said rather huskily, “Mother Hubbard! Mother Hubbard!”

And he was surprised, as well as moved. Surely Katherine would not be passed over? Surely Margaret Hubbard knew about Christopher Codrington and his understanding—whatever it might be—with Katherine Halstead. Perhaps, after all, Codrington’s kiss had not been the sign of ownership. In that case—his heart leapt within him—and then went down, right into his boots.

For at the door was Katherine Halstead, with her hand on Codrington’s arm.

“Oh, we are weary, weary!” she said. “Chris and I have been doing the gala night: and it was all very wonderful, and all very beautiful, and I could not describe all the dresses I saw and envied until I could cry. Chris has fallen in love with Tetrzzini, and has been writing prose poetry about her. But, oh—I want my supper!”

Codrington taking off a frock overcoat said, "Hulloh, Luttrell, you here?"

And Frank said, "Yes . . . but I'm just going. . . . Good-night, Mother Hubbard."

CHAPTER X

THERE was one man in Fleet Street who had a powerful influence upon Frank Luttrell. This was Edmund Grattan, the Irishman, who had come home from the Near East on the night of Mother Hubbard's birthday party. He had been round to the flat several times since then, and he had struck up a warm friendship with the younger man. Frank Luttrell had been strongly attracted towards him from the first. The little man's whimsicality and wit and tenderness, the poetry and colour of his Celtic spirit, the strange romance of his life, made an irresistible appeal to Frank's imagination. Grattan seemed to him typical of the modern adventurer, one of that race of men who, since the day of the jongleurs and troubadours have gone a-wandering in the world, from city to city, from country to country, coming in close touch with the drama of life, seeing human passions in every phase of heroism and brutality.

For twenty-five years Grattan had been a spectator of every great conflict between one nation and another, or one race and another. In India, Egypt, and South Africa he had been sun-baked, fever-stricken, wounded, and taken prisoner. In the Græco-Turkish, Spanish-American, and Russo-Japanese wars, Grattan had been special correspondent, doctor, surgeon, priest, cook, sailor, and jester. Many a time he had told Irish fairy-tales in French, Italian, Spanish, German, and in a bastard cosmopolitan lingo of his own concoction, to men starving and freezing in rain-soddened tents, and to men dying by inches in camp-hospitals. He had sung Celtic folk-songs to the wild hill-tribes of India, who had reprieved

him from death because his plaintive melodies, sung with a dauntless spirit, had touched some chord of sentiment in the hearts of brave fighting men not without chivalry and wild poetry of their own. As an Irishman and a Catholic, he had heard the confessions of soldiers on the bloody battlefields of South Africa, and had promised to tell them to a good-hearted priest who, no doubt, would give them absolution and say a mass for the soul now struggling to escape from a tortured body. It was uncanonical doubtless, but comforting, to Irish boys who do not like to die like dogs in a ditch. He had also got very, very drunk on the best wines and the vilest spirits in the world with many comrades who had now gone to the great Valhalla. He had sung "Father O'Flynn" to Zulus into whose hands he had wandered on a dark night, and who, not understanding a single word, had been moved to guttural grunts expressive of deep emotion, by what they thought, perhaps, was a war-song, or a hymn to the white men's Ju-Ju. And the hero of these adventures, who had looked into the face of death more times than he could remember, was a little man of five feet five, who looked as if he were a third-class clerk in the Education Department, or a haberdasher who put his initials at the bottom of accounts when the young ladies called out "Sign."

Grattan had been behind the scenes of many revolutionary movements in Russia and the Near East. Like most Irishmen, he was always "agin the Government" and on the side of revolt. Any band of men had but to proclaim the sacred name of Liberty, and Grattan was with them heart and soul, eager to attend their secret meetings, nor shirking their company when they defended barricades against the forces of law and order, or autocracy and tyranny. That trait of his character had led him into trouble more times than he could count;

for it often happened that he got too far entangled in a revolutionary cause to do his duty as a special correspondent to English newspapers, which, in foreign affairs at least, endeavour to get impartial news and views. Through the revolutionary days in Russia he had been so red-hot in his reports that he had been conducted over the border by Russian officials and relieved of the post on the paper he was then serving. Finding himself unattached, he had crossed into Russia again, had been arrested at a meeting of anarchists—and only escaped the prisons of Riga by a cable sent to the Russian Ministry by the Foreign Secretary in England who had a personal interest in the strange little man who had more than once brought important political information to the Foreign Office.

When there were no big or little wars on foot, Grattan was generally on a loose string in England, and consoled himself by championing the cause of Women's Suffrage, the Unemployed, and of any other little movement of revolt and unrest which he could find in the great city of London. He knew the strangest men and women in the world. He had interviewed kings and emperors in many languages; he had personal friendships in the courts of Europe; he was a hero among the social rebels of many nations; he sent Christmas and birthday presents to the wives and children of men who were in hiding for political or criminal offences, and he had the key to the doors of Bohemia—that cosmopolitan republic which owns allegiance to no king, and to no laws but those of liberty, of poverty, and of humanity. What impressed Frank most in his reading of Grattan's character, after many conversations with him in which something of his life-story had been revealed, was that, with all his stronger and varied knowledge of life in its most brutal and passionate and tragic aspects, he had a remarkable

simplicity of spirit. It was almost true to say of the Irishman that he had the heart of a child. He delighted in telling fairy-stories delicate and beautiful in fancy, and often among a group of men who, like himself, knew the coarse realities of life he would say as he had said in Mother Hubbard's flat, "Come, let us be little children for a while. Once upon a time," and then he would tell some old tale of Celtic folk-lore, or of Oriental mythology; and, strangely enough, his comrades, hard-headed men, perhaps, men who certainly came face to face with the tough problems of real life, would fall into his mood, and smoke their pipes silently while he held them spell-bound by some fantasy as light as an air-bubble about a princess with a glass heart, or a king who could not laugh, or a wandering fiddler who could make the "Weary Willies" of the world dance to his fiddling.

Grattan asked Frank round to his rooms one evening for a pipe and a yarn; and, as it was on an evening when Katherine was down for the dresses at an Embassy reception, he was glad of the invitation. The address was 305A Newport Buildings; and Frank, whose knowledge of London geography was still limited, had some difficulty in finding his way there. He found the place at the back of a narrow and squalid street in Soho, where he stayed for five minutes to watch the progress of a fight between two foreign Jews and three women. For a moment it occurred to him that he was called on to intervene, according to the old-fashioned laws of chivalry, which ordained the rescue of fair ladies in distress. In one sense of the word the ladies were certainly fair. They were blonde German women with pink-painted faces. But Frank's right arm was not needed in their defence. Stout women, with faces aflame with passion (to say nothing of the paint), they knocked the two Jews about until they whined for mercy. A crowd of foreigners of many

nationalities and of no nationality looked on hilariously until, at the sight of two stolid English policemen who thrust their way into the alley, they scuttled into side courts. The Jews also fled with scratched and bleeding faces, and the German women, arranging their front hair, made their way slowly from the scene of victory.

Frank took advantage of the policemen's arrival to ask them the way to Newport Buildings; and, though they eyed him suspiciously, they gave him the necessary direction. It was a big block of grim and ugly buildings divided into courts like workmen's dwellings, and with iron staircases leading to the iron balconies of each storey. On some of these balconies there were white and coloured garments hanging out to dry, women's petticoats and other things which were not meant for the curious eye. Here and there, on some of the balconies, frowsy women leant over the railings, shouting to each other in shrill voices, and breaking into cackling laughter after some triumph of repartee. On one of the balconies was a girl in agreeable contrast to the frowsy women. She had raven hair and a pretty, piquant, Southern-looking face, and she was neatly dressed in a spotless white blouse and dark skirt. She was singing to herself in Italian the sweet and haunting hymn of "Santa Lucia"; and at the end of each verse she called out "Dolci! Dolci! Carissima!" to a bird piping to her tune in a wicker cage.

In the courtyard itself a number of children were playing strange hopping games, and melodramas in dark doorways. They were white-faced, dark-eyed children, decently clad for the most part, but with touches of colour here and there—a green silk skirt, a pink kerchief in the hair, a short velveteen jacket, or a brown fur cap—which seemed to show that, although they lived in a London slum, they were not of English blood. Frank listened to

some of them talking. It was a babel of tongues with ejaculations and shrill cries in different languages. "*Accidenti!*" "*Cré nom!*" "*Ach, liebe Gott!*" "*Oh, crikey!*" with a flow of words in some strange cosmopolitan patois mixed with Cockney dialect.

In one corner of the court a row of children sat on a doorstep. One of them was a crippled boy with a hunched back and long legs as thin as his crutches, and with a pallid, pinched face in which two dark eyes stared out woefully and wistfully. In front of this small audience on an upturned box sat a shrivelled-up little man in black. He was playing a flute with quick fingers. The melody came piping through the courtyard, a swift, fantastic tune, mirthful in its infinite variations on one air, yet melancholy in its minor cadences. Three cats, lean and hungry-looking creatures, sat in front of the children, watching the flute-player with their green eyes; and, seeing this strange little group, Frank was vaguely reminded of some German fairy-tale. Like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, the man with the flute was calling to the souls of the children; and they sat listening to the weird melody quite motionless, as though enchanted by it.

Frank went up one of the iron staircases in one of the blocks, after asking for 305A from a small boy whose nasal twang proclaimed him to be a true-born Briton.

"Them rooms is wer' Mr. Grattan stys. 'E's a bloomin' torf, an' no mistike—I don't fink!"

"Oh, you know him, do you?" said Frank.

"Don't I, jest!" said the boy. "I wouldn't be wearin' these 'ere blimy boots if 'e 'adn't tossed me for 'alf-a-crahn egin a trahser button. An' strike me if it didn't come down 'eads!"

On the door of 305A Frank found the name Edmund Grattan, and gave a dab at the iron knocker. The door was opened by the Irishman himself. "Come in, my,

boy," he said. "Sure and it's good of you to come. You're just in time to see the prettiest little feet in Soho doing a real Hungarian jig."

There was the sound of a fiddle playing a staccato tune; and when Frank followed the Irishman into the room he saw a girl in a scarlet silk frock, with red silk stockings and shoes, dancing round a room in which most of the furniture had been piled up in a corner, with the chairs on a deal table. She was a dark, gypsy-looking girl of about sixteen, with laughing black eyes and a pretty oval face, with ripe lips and white teeth. She was dancing a wild, half-savage barcarolle with shrill little cries, springing into the air, as the fiddle rose into piercing notes, and then dancing backwards, with her hands thrust out, escaping as it seemed from some imaginary pursuer. Suddenly, as Frank entered, she stopped, laughing and panting for breath, with her hands on her hips; while the fiddler, an elderly man with oily black hair and solemn black eyes, and a long, lean, melancholy face, wiped a bead of sweat off his forehead and rubbed his bow on a piece of rosin.

"Bravo! Bravo!" said Grattan, patting the girl's shoulder. "If you are not earning £10 a week on the music-halls before long I shall be very disappointed with you."

"Oh dat would be too good! Altogeder too good," cried the girl, clasping her hands and laughing excitedly. "My fader, he say ze English people do not understan' ze poetry of ze Hungarian dance, ze passion, ze—vat you call?—romance an' drama! Ten pounds, you say! Oh, my good God, von leetle pound a veek vould make me zo 'appy as a king!"

"I 'ave been too long vaiting for vat you call ze luck," said the elderly man, with a deep sigh that was half a groan. "Ze heart of hope do not jump in ze hungry belly. Zat is a Hungarian folk-word."

"Ah, luck!" said Grattan. "That is the magic thing of life. It comes suddenly, swiftly, when it is least expected, just at the very nick of time, and then—hey presto!—the sad heart becomes a merry one, and the ragged old dress changes into a gold-spangled gown, and the old garret becomes the boudoir of a princess. My friends, do not despair. I could tell you many stories of good luck, from the time when the Little People made a king out of a cobbler and led the Beggar-Maid to the Palace of a Prince."

"Ah, you vill always tell ze fairy-tales!" cried the gypsy girl. Then, when her father spoke to her in a strange language, she said, "Yes, I come, now, at vonce."

She went over to the Irishman and put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him on both cheeks.

"God bless you, little Katarina," said Grattan; "say a prayer for me to the dear Lady."

"But yes," said the girl. "I burn 'arf a candle for you every night. 'Dear Lady,' I say, 'be kind to ze good friend of my fader an' me.' Oh yes, zat is quite true."

The elderly man clasped Grattan's hand with his bony fingers and, bending down, kissed it as though the Irishman were a king or a saint. Then they went out of the room, the girl looking back for a moment to blow him a kiss.

"Nice people," said Grattan when they had gone. "Fancy that child burning candles for me to the Madonna. I'll bet she sometimes goes without food to do that. Her fiddler father plays in the orchestra at an East End music-hall for sixteen shillings a week, and his room here costs him eight-and-six. My God! There's a lot of tragedy in the world."

Frank had been rather startled by the little scene with those "nice people" into which he had come suddenly out of the streets of London. But he had assured himself

now that he would not be surprised if a hobgoblin suddenly appeared out of the cupboard, or if an Oriental wizard suddenly issued out of a volume of smoke from the middle of the carpet, or if the ragged gentleman who had been piping to the children of the court poked his head through the door and offered to play "Over the Hills and Far Away." It was sufficiently strange to find a distinguished war-correspondent and journalist domiciled in the centre of a Soho slum, applauding the strange, fantastic dance of a Hungarian gypsy girl, and allowing his hand to be kissed by an oily old man who certainly had not used soap for a long time.

Grattan's room also suggested the most curious possibilities. Over the doorway hung a gorgeous Oriental tapestry with a Saracenic design, and the deal boards of the floor were strewn with Persian rugs. On the mantelpiece, instead of a clock, was a bronze Buddha with a solemn, inscrutable face, with some broken remnants of Greek figures in red clay on either side. On the walls were hung pencil and charcoal sketches of soldiers in the uniforms of many nations, and caricatures of many strange types of humanity. In a recess at the end of the room was a garishly-coloured statue of the Madonna and Child in gilt crowns. On each side of the fire-place stood a mummy case propped up on end. A pair of foils and three revolvers made a trophy on the opposite wall; and here and there, on unpainted deal shelves, were curiously-carved tusks, African fetishes and charms, and masks, Japanese bronzes, a Russian *ikon*, a beautiful ivory and ebony crucifix, and miscellaneous objects, like a pair of tiny gold-worked slippers, a lock of a woman's hair in an oval frame, a human skull, a pair of handcuffs, and Mexican spurs with long rowels. In such a room Frank felt himself breathing an atmosphere of romantic and adventurous memories, which, however, could hardly

be reconciled with the whimsical face of the Irishman who sat smoking quietly in the midst of these relics.

"Did you ever see such a den?" said Grattan, who had noticed Frank's roving eyes. "It's a queer kind of place to call 'home'; and yet I think of it as my 'snug little kingdom up four pairs of stairs,' and it is pleasant to come back to it from foreign parts. You see I am a bird of passage, and I don't need much accommodation. Besides, I have many friends in Newport Buildings."

He spoke with the greatest affection of a clown who performed twice daily at the Hippodrome, and who, like most of his class, was the most melancholy and miserable man when off duty. Nature had been unkind to him in giving him a comical face with a turned-up nose and a twisted mouth. But for those accidents of nature he might have been a serious actor in melodrama, which had been his early ambition. But his heart was of the right shape, and he would give private performances in the court below to the children, who laughed until their sides ached at his droll grimaces and the high-pitched voice in which he made the best jokes in the world and brought a whole farmyard into Soho. Another of Grattan's friends was an old Russian gentleman living in the next room down the passage who was the greatest genius in the science of explosives. "I assure you, my boy," said Grattan, "that if you ever want to blow up a newspaper office, which I am inclined to think would be a great service to Almighty God, old Petrov Petrovitch will provide you with a bomb small enough to pop into your waistcoat pocket and powerful enough to do an admirable amount of damage. He is a most charming old gentleman with a great fund of natural benevolence."

In a room on the storey below, said Grattan, lived an old Italian who had been a hero in his time. He was a giant of a man, though now a physical wreck, in a tiny

bed-sitting-room which he seemed to fill with his immense bulk of flesh. Above his mantelpiece were coloured pictures of Garibaldi and King Humbert; and by the side of them hung a great cavalry sword, which in his youth this veteran of Italy's struggle for independence had flashed in many a furious charge. On the table were the medals he had won, which he showed to Grattan one day with trembling pride, and in an album he had portraits of many of his old comrades. As he looked at their faces, and remembered that most of them were dead, tears had fallen from the old man's eyes and splashed heavily on to the page. Then he had turned to another portrait of a blonde young giant in a cavalry uniform, and Grattan had seen by a sudden dreaminess and wistfulness that came into his eyes that he was thinking of his youth. He gave a great sigh that was something like a sob, and his old wife came to him, and, putting a hand on his shoulder, said something in her soft Italian. When the King of Italy came to London, Grattan put the huge old man into a four-wheeled cab and took him to join the Old Guard of Garibaldian veterans at the Italian Embassy. The King shook hands with him, and it made amends for a long exile.

Grattan told other stories of the strange lives surrounding him in this block of buildings in Soho. There were many foreigners among them, employed in connection with the theatres round Piccadilly as property-masters, wardrobe men and women, limelighters, stage-carpenters, and theatrical dress and wig-makers. No one, said Grattan, who sits in the stalls, or the gods watching a new ballet or a gorgeous pantomime, thinks of the work that goes to the making of all this splendour. But in Poverty Palace (as he called the place) from early morning until late in the night there are women sitting in little rooms, stitching at those flimsy, shimmering

garments which display the beauty of the ballet ladies, sewing their silken slippers, and their long, slim stockings, twisting paper flowers into wreaths, and bespangling costumes which will dazzle the eyes of the groundlings. There are many foreign tailors in these flats of three rooms, which may be rented for eleven shillings a week; and at night, said Grattan, one may see, sometimes, by the light of a dim lamp illuminating a black window-pane the shadow of an arm jerking upwards with a rhythmic gesture as one of them works overtime, and stitches, stitches, stitches with dogged industry.

The Irishman told Frank of other strange trades and strange people in the neighbouring rooms. There were men of letters who write by candle-light, with hot hearts and feverish eyes, and wild, disordered hair. They are men whose names and pseudonyms are known to the secret police of foreign cities, and who bear on their bodies the marks of prison sufferings. They are writing that black literature which preaches a wild gospel of liberty and blood, and is smuggled across the Continent in leaflets which find their way to soldiers' barracks and sailors' bunks, and night-clubs where men come in unlawful assembly with bloodshot eyes and smouldering hearts.

Grattan told Frank of old men who lived lonely lives in this block of grim, sunless buildings. They are kept alive by the memory of triumphs forgotten by all except themselves, of good days which are now yesterdays. One of them sits with sightless eyes, thinking always of these things. He remembers when laughter surged at him from full houses; when, as he stood alone before the footlights, the applause thundered at him when his quick brain worked out a new gag which made him the darling of the gods. The old jokes come floating through his mind as he gropes back into the past with blind

eyes. Then he listens for his daughter. She is late to-night, perhaps, and the kippers are growing cold. The world would not call her a good woman, but she is kind to her old father.

"Frank, my boy," said Grattan, "there are many poor devils within a spit of you, actors of old renown in stock companies where 'the ghost walked' long ago, old singers with cracked voices, old fiddlers whose fingers are stiff-jointed, the wreck and rubbish of humanity kicked into its lumber-room of broken things."

He sighed mournfully, and for a while was silent. Then he raised his head and said with a smile—

"Listen! How the children are laughing and squealing in the courtyard. It does one a power of good to hear them."

Once, but not on the first night of Frank's visit to his rooms, he spoke about his wife as though she were dead; and afterwards Frank noticed how he used to date everything from the time of her going away. "It was before my wife had gone—rest her soul," or "That was when my little woman was with me." Late one evening when Frank was alone with him, he raised the glass of whisky he was drinking and said, "This is the poison that killed the love of the best woman that ever kissed a man."

With a sudden gesture of passion he threw half a tumblerful of whisky on to the fire. It quenched the flames, and the wet embers fizzled and smoked. Such moods were rare with him, and generally preceded one of those periods when he disappeared for a week from Fleet Street and all his well-known haunts, and when his friends whispered that "he had gone to find his wife." Then he would come back chastened, very humble, very eager to do any little act of kindness to some one "down on his luck," or some gracious little thing to Margaret

Hubbard, to Katherine, or other friends. 'At such times, if Frank were alone with him, he would speak of his religion, and especially of the Blessed Virgin, for whom he seemed to have a kind of mystical and passionate love, as the type of purest and infinitely compassionate womanhood.

"My boy," he said to Frank once, "the reverence of divine womanhood in the sacred and beautiful figure of Our Lady is very cleansing to the filthy hearts of men. The thought of divine motherhood and virgin innocence drags them out of the mire. It gives them a bright vision, to which they grope their way through the darkness of their own sinfulness. That is why the Irish people never indulge in the black, unnatural vices of humanity. God knows many of them are weak, like myself, many of them are brutal, but the memory of the 'Hail Mary' taught to them in the old cabin and the little church comes singing into their ears when the devil lures them to his blackest pits. And even if they descend to the lowest depths the face of the Madonna looks down at them; and, with one 'Ave Maria' shouted from a tortured heart, they leap out of the clutches of the foul fiend and stretch out their hands to the Mother of Mercy."

Frank was deeply absorbed in the study of this extraordinary man's character, and especially by these revelations of his faith. Frank himself would not have labelled himself a "freethinker." He belonged to a generation in which that label had lost its novelty and glamour; to a period in which none of the old labels of religious agnosticism or scepticism excite any passionate emotions in the minds of young men. He was not an agnostic or a materialist, or a pessimist, or even a follower of Nietzsche, or Karl Marx, or Bernard Shaw. All these are fashions of thought which had an influence yesterday, but are to-day as old-fashioned as Arianism or Calvinism. Frank

Luttrell simply "didn't bother." Having gone through all the stages of doubt and disbelief, he had decided, not deliberately or consciously, to adopt an attitude of religious inactivity, as though waiting for some other philosophy to come along, which, no doubt, would have its day like others and then die.

At this time of his life he did not feel the need of any religious stimulus or consolation. Religion, for a time, was outside the scope of his inquiry. He was a journalist investigating the facts of humanity. As yet he had no business with the laws governing those facts, with the spiritual force behind them. Vicary, the news-editor, had not asked him for reports on those subjects. That, perhaps, is how Frank would have explained his own position if he had been questioned. And there would have been sincerity as well as irony in his answer. But, though he did not "bother" about religion at this time, the spiritual side of his nature was not dormant. On the contrary, his spirituality was intensified and sensitised. His spirit was, to use a clumsy metaphor, like a camera exposing an immense number of photographic plates on which the light of life was imprinting instantaneous but enduring impressions. His soul, to use another clumsy metaphor, was like a stringed instrument made and tuned by loving hands in which there are all the possibilities of infinite melodies and discords, and now was being played upon by thousands of invisible fingers, which struck thrilling chords, and jangled notes, and music that was sometimes very gay and sometimes very sad, and sometimes weird and fantastic. What he needed was some guiding hand of a master-musician who would arrange all those stray chords and disconnected notes into order and rhythm and symphony.

Like many men who have been brought up in old-fashioned homes, he had all the traditions and promptings

of a religious nature without a definite religious belief. He was on the side of the angels, though not among them. He hated cruelty and vice, and lies and treachery. He had an instinctive love of kindness, sympathy, cleanliness of heart, and truthfulness. He shrank from the sight of human suffering, and was thrilled by the courage of those who suffer. But he was without the spirit of the reformer. He had no determined ambition to make the world better. He merely watched and explored, and tried to understand, and was intensely interested in human hearts. Only occasionally was he startled and perplexed by deeper feelings.

Once when he walked down the Embankment late one night he stopped and stared at the river, moving by like a flood of printers' ink, as it seemed to him, on its way to Fleet Street. And then suddenly he turned and looked up one of the avenues to the lights in that street beyond, and some overwhelming emotion flooded his spirits. He could not tell what was the meaning of it; he only knew that his heart was beating in a jerky way, that a kind of cold wave pressed from the back of his head down his spine, and that then he seemed to have got outside his own body. "My God!" he said. "All those people—all those buildings. What is the meaning of it all—this swarming life, these endless births and deaths?" He was not moralising deliberately, as young men do who have read a little poetry and a little philosophy. It seemed as if some voice had put the question to him. He was dimly conscious that for a moment he had stood on the edge of the supernatural, and he was afraid of himself. Then he got back into his body, and walked on to Northumberland Avenue, where he read the advertisements outside the Playhouse, smiling at the photograph of a nautical play, in a normal state of mind again.

Perhaps his senses were over-sensitive and affected his

spirit. The smell of hay in a mews behind St. James's Street made him stand one day for a minute or two in a kind of dream, in which he saw himself as a boy lying on the mown grass drying in the sun in the glebe-field at home, listening to the hum of insect life, watching his mother reading in a camp-chair, and thinking how beautiful she was in her lilac sun-bonnet.

And once when he was waiting for a fat old duchess to open an exhibition of "Infant Health," standing among a group of over-dressed women, he suddenly forgot his environment and went climbing to the hill-top outside the village at home, where as a boy he used to watch the sunset change into a thousand colour-harmonies, until all the sky was quivering with reflected light. He was awakened by the sound of "God Save the King," played on a cottage piano in another room, and by the royal duchess saying in German gutturals, "I haf moch pleaz-har in deglaring this egzhibition open." He wondered afterwards what had given him this day-dream; and then he remembered that one of the women near him had been wearing violets. The scent had taken him to the shady lane where as a boy he had picked violets for his mother; and when once his imagination had been taken back to the winding path, his spirit went walking further, to the hill-top beyond. This sensitiveness, natural and spiritual, made him vividly impressed by the strange personality of Edmund Grattan. For Grattan appealed both to his natural and spiritual sensibility. He had a voice which had a rather melancholy timbre, and when he was deeply moved it became deeper in tone, with the musical inflections of the Irish way of speech. When he spoke of his faith, or when he was telling a fairy-story, his eyes glowed with a luminous and rather haunting fire. Frank was often startled by the extraordinary paradoxes of the man's character and by the strange, romantic and

secret tragedy of his life, but what most impressed him was this devotion to the Virgin Mother in a man who for the greater part of his life had wandered among the Bohemians, the adventurers, the heretics, the anarchists, the infidels, and the outcasts of the modern world.

It was Grattan who put up Frank Luttrell as a member of the Journalist Club. He was seconded by Brandon, and elected without opposition. Grattan had said to him, "My boy, you will never be a journalist until you belong to the Club," and Frank, who thought himself a journalist already, only understood what Grattan had meant when he had been a member for some weeks.

The place itself was not inviting. Its entrance was up a narrow court of Fleet Street; and on the doorway was a notice in big black letters saying that no strangers would be admitted until their names had been "sent in" to the member they wanted to see. A glass window to the right of the door gave vocal access to the inquiry office, which was also the bar. When the window opened to Luttrell, who inquired for Grattan, his nostrils were assailed by the smell of stale tobacco and the fumes of whisky and wine, and he heard the clink of glasses, a burst of loud laughter, and one voice shouting out—

"And the end of the story was——"

Luttrell did not hear the end of the story, for, after mentioning his own and Grattan's name, the man at the window, who was uncorking a bottle of port, shut down the glass with a bang.

Grattan came to fetch him in, and Frank found himself in a long room, divided at one end by the bar which he had seen through the window. Against the bar were leaning four or five men, among whom were the little sporting editor Birkenshaw, whom he had met at Margaret Hubbard's flat one night, and Christopher Codrington, looking rather pale, and enormously tall by the side

of his companion. There were about twenty other men in the room, deep in easy-chairs, smoking, drinking every variety of liquid, hot and cold, and carrying on a cross-fire of conversation.

Several of the men looked up as Grattan entered with Luttrell and called out to him.

"Hullo, Teddy, what's yours, old man?"

"Nothing at all, at all," said Grattan, with a richer brogue than he usually affected.

He directed Frank's attention to a collection of coloured caricatures which ran the whole length of the room. They were mad dreams of human faces and figures, monstrosously ludicrous and amazingly clever.

"Great Scott!" said Frank with a gasp. "That's you, isn't it?"

"I should rather say it was," said Grattan, as though he were proud of this distorted likeness. "It's not only a portrait of my outward characteristics, it is a most damnable and realistic study of my ridiculous brain."

Luttrell recognised other men on the staff of his own paper, Brandon, Quin, Vicary, and others, each caricature giving him a kind of shock—it was so unmistakably like the original, yet so wildly and hideously distorted.

"The man who does these," he said, "is either a madman or a genius."

"Both," said Grattan, "but one of the best."

Luttrell will not soon forget his first evening at the Club. Grattan introduced him to two or three of the men, ordered a whisky-and-soda for him, and then went over to the bar where he stood smoking a pipe with three or four other men who patted him on the back and seemed to make a hero of him. Frank was again a spectator and a listener. It would seem to be the part he had to play in life.

A slim, boyish fellow in a frock-coat, very creased

about the tails, and trousers baggy at the knees, was standing with his back to the fire telling with a perfectly grave face an obviously impossible story of how he was wrecked in a small yacht on the Goodwin Sands. He piled absurdity on absurdity, until at last his imagination took free rein as he described how he chased the boat for hours as it drifted round the sandbanks, always a few yards ahead of him as he waded knee-deep in water. His nautical expressions caused shouts of laughter; and he was prompted in certain episodes of the adventure when his fancy halted for a moment.

"Well done, Bunny," said one of the men, wiping tears out of his eyes, when the story was finished. "As an honest lie that's the best story I've heard for a long time. What are you drinking?"

Another nautical story succeeded from a man who looked the real thing, with a big, brown, seafaring face. He described how, when he was the skipper of a tramp steamer on the West Coast of Africa, he received a cable from the owner to bring home 102 monkeys, with his cargo of rubber and palm oil. The order seemed eccentric; but he took his crew for a monkey-hunt, and after the most perilous and exciting adventures, captured the required number of beasts. They were brought on board and put into temporary cages made by the ship's carpenter. All went well for a week; and the monkeys, with their heads through the wooden bars of their hutches on deck, watched the sailormen at work with obvious interest. Then a tragedy happened. The monkeys broke out early one morning and ran amok on deck. One great beast seized a marline-spike and chased the chief mate up the rigging. Three others took possession of the bridge, from which the skipper himself had fled. The other sailors had gone below hatches, and had battened themselves down. After terrible experiences, the vessel

came by God's grace into the mouth of the Thames, where she was hailed by the Port Sanitary authorities, who were surprised to see a crew of the ugliest old scoundrels indulging in wild orgies on deck. Evidently there was a mutiny on board. The skipper put his head out of a porthole and explained the painful situation; and, after a desperate fight, the monkeys were overpowered and the vessel towed to Blackwall Dock.

"Then," said the story-teller, "I went to see my owners; and I need not describe in detail the flowers of speech which fell from my lips. I have never done myself so much justice. In the end, however, the owners explained that an error must have crept into the cable which had caused all the trouble. Instead of 102 monkeys, they had merely asked for one or two. They prepared to take proceedings against the postal authorities, and in the meantime they relieved me of my berth. That, gentlemen, is why I became a journalist."

This story, told in real seafaring speech, was received with yells of laughter. But a momentary silence followed when a newcomer entered the club. It was a good-looking fellow of about thirty with a pale, clean-shaven face.

"Well, old boy," said one of the men, "how goes it?"

"Oh, fine!" said the man, with a kind of forced cheerfulness. "Stand me a drink, some one."

Half-a-dozen of the men called for the drink, and room was made for the unlucky one. Luttrell learnt afterwards from Grattan that the man had been dismissed at a moment's notice by a new editor of his paper who was cutting down expenses. He had been married a year ago, and his wife had just given birth to a child. "What the poor beggar will do, I don't know," said Grattan. "It's not easy to get another job. The tragedy of it is that he hasn't had the pluck to tell his wife in her delicate

condition, and stays out all day long, pretending he's at the office as usual."

Luttrell listened to the conversation of the men round him. One stout, youngish man with a Shakespearean forehead above a Cupid face which seemed to be oozing with the most genial good-nature was criticising contemporary literature and drama with laughing satire. He denounced Bernard Shaw as an arch-charlatan. "The fellow has never put up a single original idea. He has cribbed everything from Ibsen and Nietzsche."

Another man also of stout build, with a rather swollen face and fresh complexion reminding one curiously of a school-boy with the mumps, was discussing certain political personalities with almost brutal cynicism. Judging from his stories they were all liars, mostly knaves, and hypocrites of the deepest dye.

A good-looking young Jew, with piercing eyes and an actor's mobile lips, was dissecting the souls of society women with a clever cruelty which made Luttrell shiver.

A tall, swarthy young man with fuzzy black hair, upon which rested a tall hat of an oily brilliance, was describing the bribery and corruption which he had seen at a recent bye-election. "If I had told the truth about it in the *Rag* there would have been the devil to pay," he said.

"Why didn't you?" asked one of the men.

The fuzzy-haired gentlemen shrugged his shoulders.

"Do we ever tell the truth?" he asked.

"No," said the other man, "and that is why the Press has lost all its power. One of these days some one will come into Fleet Street with the pluck to tell the truth. Then he will smash creation, and every other newspaper dragging out a miserable life, bolstered up by party friends, and keeping itself out of bankruptcy by swindling advertisements."

"How about the laws of libel? How the devil can we

afford to tell the truth when any scoundrel can claim heavy damages—and get 'em nine times out of ten? The whole machinery of the law is to prevent truth being told."

"Oh rats! It's because editors have all got the blue funk. What we want is another William Cobbett, who hammered at the truth with a good square fist, and was not afraid to go to prison in an honest cause."

"Oh, that sort of thing don't pay nowadays. We're all after circulation and ads., and damn sincerity. After all, what's the good of taking ourselves seriously? Nobody else does."

In all this conversation there was not one word of optimism, of idealism, or enthusiasm. These men, young and old, seemed to have lost all illusions, and a knowledge of life had made them *blasé* and utterly cynical.

But the conversation of these men was impressive to one who came from another world, who was one of them—yet almost a stranger among them. Each spoke always with knowledge. They had all come closely and constantly in touch with interesting people and interesting things. Some of them were coarse in their speech, some were of the smart cockney type, one or two had obviously picked up what education they had in the streets and not in the schools. But even the youngest among them—boys who, as Frank knew from his own experience, could not be earning more than £3 or £4 a week—spoke with the understanding and the quick mother-wit of men who have seen most of the world's peep-shows and measured up its puppets and pomposities. They were all critics, untouched by hero-worship and lacking all instincts of reverence.

One thing was curious in this club. It had a shifting population. Few men kept their seats for more than half-an-hour. Men were always going out, and others

always coming in. A man would rise, stretch his arms and say, "Well, I must go and do a bit of work." Another would run through a time-table and say, "I can get to Paddington in twenty-five minutes with a little luck." Each man seemed to have a curiosity in the other man's business. "Are you on that Chelmsford story? . . . By gad, so am I! We may as well go together, old buck." "What are you doing down there? Oh, all right, if you've got a scoop on, keep it to yourself, my lad. I don't go in for scoops at my time of life. They use up a lot of energy, and one generally gets left."

At a few minutes after midnight quite a new crowd of men came in, and stood round the bar drinking and talking. They belonged to a different type of humanity from those who had taken possession of the club chairs earlier in the evening. There were not so many young men among them, and they were not so smartly dressed. They had not the same vivacity and restlessness. Their eyes were tired, and most of them spoke the Scottish language.

"Who are those fellows?" said Frank to Grattan, who was now sipping whisky at his side and telling endless tales of adventures. Frank also was drinking whisky, which unloosened his tongue and made him laugh hilariously at Grattan's stories. Six empty glasses stood on the table before him.

"Those, my boy," said Grattan, "belong to that unhappy race of men who call themselves 'Subs.' They have amazing dexterity with blue pencils, and they are the sworn foes of descriptive writers. Their whole object in life is to cut down. They are the butchers of journalism. Never creating anything, their imaginations have been stunted, and their souls have shrunk to the size of sixpenny-bits. Most of them live at Brixton, where they keep wives and babies. All of them have

lost ambition, hope, and youthfulness. They are more to be pitied than the convicts of Portland."

"They seem pretty cheerful now," said Frank.

Grattan stared across at them with eyes in which there was an alcoholic fire.

"Their laughter is mirthless," he said. "It comes from empty hearts."

He gripped Frank's knee.

"Luttrell," he said almost fiercely, "never be drawn into a sub-editor's room. Avoid it as you would the pit of hell. Rather starve, rather die with cold under Blackfriars Bridge than become a slave and a sub. Better the body perish than the immortal soul."

The men whom he had been commiserating were going out. They had only stayed ten minutes or so, and in that time some of them had consumed a remarkable quantity of whisky.

"Ah weel," said one of them, "the last tram waits for no mon. Gude nicht to ye all."

The club was now really empty. Only three men sat round the fire-place, where Grattan was still talking and sipping whisky, and where Frank, no longer listening to Grattan, was talking also, and describing in an eloquence that surprised himself the effect of moonlight on the river at Westminster Bridge. No one was paying the slightest attention to him, but he was pleased with the sound of his own words, and became emotional at the thought of his imagination being wasted in journalism, so emotional that tears welled into his eyes, and were only checked when he laughed hilariously at Grattan, who had overturned his glass of whisky. The man at the bar, in a crumpled evening suit, much grease-stained, was nodding over a pink paper. The sight of him made Frank sleepy, and he, too, nodded with his chin on his

chest, waking up with a jerk when Grattan rose and steadied himself by gripping Frank's shoulder.

"Time to go," he said. "What d'ye mean by keeping me up so late, ye young devil?"

Frank got up, wondering why the room was moving round so curiously, and why there were two men at the bar in crumpled evening suits with pink papers.

"Time to go?" he said in a dazed way. "What d'you want to go for? Just beginning to enjoy myself."

Grattan smacked him on the back.

"Dissolute young scoundrel," he said, "leading your old uncle into temptation."

Frank was groping his way along the hat-rack, which was now almost empty.

"Funny thing!" he said to himself. "Where've all the hats gone to?"

After several efforts he found his own and put it on his head without noticing that it was the wrong way round.

He followed Grattan out of the club, and arm-in-arm they went into Fleet Street.

Grattan stood looking up and down the street, which was now quiet and almost deserted. But on the other side of the road a scarecrow in fluttering rags padded swiftly along noiselessly, as though afraid of a black shadow in a pool of light, where a policeman stood under a lamp-post.

"Fleet Street!" said Grattan. "The Street of Adventure! What a legion of lost souls have passed this way!" He took off his hat, and staring in a melancholy way up and down, said in a low voice, "Old comrades, where are ye all?" He muttered one or two names and then said, "May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace." Then he crossed himself, and said, "Good-bye, old fellow. God bless you."

Frank wiped some cold sweat off his forehead.

"Grattan," he said solemnly, "you're the victim of superstition."

He found the last word difficult to say. He repeated it several times unsuccessfully, and then he found that Grattan had left him. For a moment he wanted to sit down on the curbstone and to burst into tears. It was unkind of Grattan to go off like that, very unkind. How was he going to get home alone? Somebody had turned Fleet Street into a switchback. Funny thing, he had no sooner climbed up hill than he plunged down into a valley again. It made his head ache horribly. It made him feel sea-sick. Then some idea seemed to break its way through the fog in his head.

"I am drunk," he said. "That's what it is. I'm drunk."

He kept repeating the words to himself in an idiotic, helpless way. He leant up against a doorway, and it seemed to him that he would have to stay there until he died.

Then a tall figure stood in front of him.

It was Christopher Codrington.

"Hulloh, Luttrell," said the tall figure, which to Frank seemed as high as the dome of St. Paul's. "What's the matter with you? You look frightfully ill, man."

"I'm drunk," said Frank. "I tell you I'm drunk."

Codrington gave a low laugh.

"You surprise me," he said in his polite way. "I always thought you were above temptation."

"I'm drunk," said Frank. Then he became very angry. He did not like those pale eyes staring at him.

"Take your eyes off me," he said. "You know you've bewitched Katherine with them. Poor little Kitty! Why, I would give my soul to save her from you."

Codrington laughed again, but there was a note of anger in the sound.

"My dear fool, don't talk sky-bosh. Go home."

"I say you are trying to ruin Miss Katherine Halstead," said Frank fiercely. "You're a blackguard, a low, dirty blackguard. Why can't you leave the poor girl alone?"

"If you mention that lady's name again," said Codrington, "I shall have the painful duty of knocking you down."

"Do you think she doesn't see through your mask?" said Frank. "Katherine is not to be deceived by those cold, smiling eyes——"

Codrington's arm went out from the shoulder and Frank fell down like a log.

"My God!" said Codrington.

He bent down over the fallen boy, who lay quite still. A black shadow crossed the road. It was a policeman. "What's this?" he said.

"It's all right, officer," said Codrington. "This gentleman has got too much whisky inside him. Any chance of a cab?"

The policeman looked up and down Fleet Street.

"There's one coming along now," he said. "It's a bit of luck for your friend. He looks bad, don't he?"

Codrington put his arm under Luttrell's head, grasped his coat and hauled him up.

"Luttrell," he said, "pull yourself together, man."

Frank groaned. "Oh, my God!" he said feebly.

The policeman and Codrington managed to get him inside the cab, and Codrington mounted the step and told the driver to get to Staple Inn. Then he sat by Frank's side and said, "I'm sorry, Luttrell. I ought not to have hit you. But you deserved it, you know."

That night Frank went to bed with his clothes on.

When the morning light crept through his window-blinds after a night of agony his face was white and haggard. He got up and made a cup of tea on a small spirit stove and gulped down the hot liquid. He was shivering in every limb, and his head was still throbbing. But he was now quite sober, and more miserable than he had ever been in his life before.

Once before he had been drunk. It was up at Oxford when he had got into trouble on bonfire night. But then he had been only hilarious, intoxicated more by the wine of youth and by the wild excitement of leading a college riot. Last night had been redeemed by no such frolic. He had just sat and soaked whisky while he was listening to Grattan's stories. He had made a beast of himself, and that last scene in Fleet Street when he had abused Codrington and had measured his own length on the pavement was utterly degrading and loathesome. What would his father and mother have thought if they could have seen him lying in the mud, which still stained his clothes? What would Katherine and Mother Hubbard say if they heard of that sordid adventure? Perhaps Codrington would tell them. At the thought Luttrell's face flushed scarlet, and he groaned aloud. Good God! Supposing Codrington told them! Then he reproached himself for thinking so meanly of the man. He had been kind last night. He had behaved like a gentleman, even in knocking him down. He had deserved that. And afterwards Codrington had helped him to his rooms and put him on to the bed and bent over him and patted his shoulder and said, "You'll be all right in the morning, old man."

Luttrell remembered these things as a kind of dark and horrible dream. For an hour or more he sat staring into the cold grate where last night's ashes lay. His face was white and set as he gripped the arms of the chair.

It seemed to him in that hour of remorse that he had gone one step further down the path of degradation. He was gradually sinking into the mire of Fleet Street. Its mud was upon him now, body and soul.

He got up shivering and changed his suit, and tried to brush the filth off the clothes he had worn last night. But the stains of the slush in Fleet Street would not come off.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Frank Luttrell went to the office at half-past eleven in the morning he hoped devoutly that he would not look as bad as he felt. His head was still throbbing as though a steam hammer were at work in his brain, it seemed as though his eyes were deep in their sockets, and his tongue felt two sizes too big for his palate. But worse than this was the sense of shame which made him afraid of meeting his colleagues, and especially afraid of Katherine Halstead and Margaret Hubbard. He felt that he ought to go through some ceremony of purification before going into the presence of either of these women.

As it happened Katherine was the first person he met when he went into the reporters' room. She gave him a cheery "Good-morning," and he answered in such a queer strained voice that she instantly looked up, suspecting that all was not well with him. She stared at his white face and sunken eyes, and gave a little cry of alarm.

"How ill you look! What on earth is the matter?"

"Nothing," said Frank.

"Oh yes, there is something the matter with you," said Katherine. "You are like a ghost. Have you had bad news or anything?"

Frank laughed, rather feebly, and sat down in a chair. He felt weak about the knees.

"I suppose I have got a bit of a chill."

Katherine crossed swiftly over to him and put her hand on his forehead.

"Influenza!" she said. "You must go to bed at once, Frank."

It was the first time she had called him by his Christian name, and the touch of her cool hand upon his aching forehead was thrilling to him. But he shrank from that touch, and thrust her back gently with his hand.

"Don't. You ought not to touch me!"

He meant that he was unworthy, that after his moral downfall, he ought not to allow the girl to come near him.

But she laughed, and said that she was not afraid of infection. Then she rang the bell and sent the boy out for sixpennyworth of quinine.

Frank cursed himself as a hypocrite. How could he explain to her that he was not suffering from influenza, but from—drink?

"How good you are! It makes up for——"

"For what?" said Katherine.

"For not having had a sister."

"It seems to me that you want *some* one to look after you," said Katherine very seriously.

"Yes, I believe I do. I want——" He did not finish his sentence. What he would have liked to say was that he wanted Katherine to look after him, that he wanted to tell her that if they could make an arrangement to look after each other along the road he would never be unwell again, but go through the world with a singing heart. With her hand in his he would be strong to resist temptation. He would keep his heart clean for her. He would avoid the club and all places which led to a headache in the morning. But, of course, he could not tell her any of these things, so that he stammered and blushed and looked a fool.

"I shall have to tell Mother Hubbard about this," said Katherine, with a mischievous gleam in her eyes. "She

will have to crochet a woolen scarf for you. She has made one for nearly every member of the staff."

"Oh, don't tell Mother Hubbard. I beg of you not!"

"Well, I don't intend to tell her at this precise moment," said Katherine, "because she would deprive me of the employment of making you take nasty medicine. You have no idea how strong the nursing instinct is among women. It is the only time when we really have the upper hand of men. . . . I mean, when they are unwell. Now you must be very good, or I shall at once send for Margaret Hubbard. She has been a professional nurse, and stands no nonsense whatever."

The office boy came back with the quinine, and Katherine, who really seemed to be enjoying herself, measured out a stiff dose in a tumbler which she brought from the lavatory.

"I say!" said Frank. "Can't I do something different for you? If you ask me to put my hand into a burning fire I will do so, but I really can't take that quinine."

"What nonsense you do talk," said Katherine. "Now be brave and drink this and I will give you a lump of sugar afterwards."

Frank stared at the whitish liquid in the glass and went pale. He wondered, with terror, what the chemical result would be of quinine versus alcohol. He felt assured that if he drank it he would die.

"I can't drink it. Honour bright, I really can't," he said piteously.

"What?" cried Katherine incredulously. "Do you mean to say you funk it? Pull yourself together, and play cricket?"

The old school slang was a challenge to him. It brought the blood back to his brain and tightened his nerves.

"Look here," he said. "If you'll give me a kiss instead of a lump of sugar I'll do it."

Katherine blushed vividly, and was silent for a moment.

"All right," she said, and Frank saw that though she had lowered her head, she had the flicker of a smile on her lips.

He drank the quinine at one draught, and for a moment it seemed as if his head was bursting.

Then he went forward to Katherine to receive his reward. She had gone rather pale, and shrank back as he bent down his face towards her.

"Do you mind if I don't keep my promise?" she said. "I have just remembered——"

"Remembered what?"

"It wouldn't be quite playing the game."

"Whose game?"

"Well, it wouldn't be quite right of me, I think," she said simply, and for a moment it seemed as if there was trouble in her eyes.

Then Frank remembered something. He remembered that when she had put her hand on his forehead he had shrunk from her touch, not thinking himself worthy. Now the old feeling of shame came over him again, and with something like despair he agreed in his heart that it would not be right for Katherine to kiss him.

"If you think that," he said slowly, as though the words were dragged out of him, "I will not ask you."

She drew a quick breath, and there was a curious expression on her face when she looked up at him.

"Oh," she said in a low voice, "thank you for letting me off!"

They were both embarrassed now. Frank tried to hide his nervousness by poking the fire and whistling.

Katherine had gone to her desk and was pretending to arrange her papers.

"Don't you think you ought to get home and go to bed?" she said presently.

"Good lord, no," said Frank. "I'm feeling as right as a trivet after that horrible quinine."

They both laughed and the momentary spell of self-consciousness seemed to be broken.

"There now!" cried Katherine. "Wasn't I a wise woman? I shall be able to crow over Mother Hubbard. She is a homeopathist and gives little pilules to her patients. I believe in nasty liquid medicines. They inspire so much more confidence."

The truth was that Frank was feeling an awful wreck, and his head seemed to be on fire. But he was glad that Katherine took the credit of a cure. His suffering was a kind of penance for his folly, and not profitless if it gave her any pleasure. Soon afterwards she went out to work and he was left alone with his thoughts. They were not pleasant, for he was now wondering why she had first promised to kiss and then refused. She said it would not be playing the game, and he asked, "Whose game?" She had not answered that question, but Frank guessed the answer. It was Christopher Codrington. His spirits sank very low after that, and he felt sick at heart—sick in another sense, for the quinine had made him feel horribly queer. He also must play the game—with Codrington, who had behaved like a gentleman last night. And the only way in which he could hope to play the game was to avoid the society of Katherine Halstead, whom he desired most in the world. "This game of life is not so easy as cricket," said Frank Luttrell.

Later in the day he met Codrington, who looked at him curiously.

"My dear friend," he said, smiling, "you look quite washed out. I am afraid you had a bad night."

"I want to forget all about it," said Frank. He flushed hotly and then held out his hand.

"I behaved like a cad last night. Do you forgive me?"

Codrington took his hand in a limp grasp.

"Tut, tut," he said, "and again tut!" He insisted upon taking Luttrell out to luncheon. He explained that Frank needed a tonic. He knew a recipe which put any man right in a twinkling of an eye after a rather "severe experience." He was not a vain prophet, for after drinking a dose obtained at a chemist's shop on the way to his eating-house Frank felt more brisk and decidedly hungry.

"I have never known it to fail," said Codrington. "It is a most useful recipe to a man of the world."

"A man of the world?" said Frank. "Is that what you call it?"

Over the luncheon-table Codrington, to Frank's amazement, expressed his pleasure at having discovered him liable to the ordinary weaknesses of human nature. Previously he had been under the impression that Frank was one of those high souls, those pure and ethereal beings who never bring themselves down to the level of the earth. Now, that was a mistake. It might be very nice to be a pure, ethereal being, but, after all, the world was made for men and women who always felt uncomfortable in the presence of superior beings. He believed that if a man wanted to do any good work in literature—and he presumed Frank had ambitions that way—he must have learnt all the great lessons of life. He must have loved, he must have suffered, he must have seen death. He must have been hungry. He must have known the sting of poverty. He must have enjoyed lux-

try. And certainly not the least important lesson in life was to know how to get drunk like a gentleman.

Frank did not know whether to laugh or to be angry. Codrington's pleasure in his descent from "superiority" was worse than contemptuous words.

"Unfortunately," he said, "I got drunk like a cad. My only excuse is that I did it unconsciously. I forgot to keep a watch on my glass."

"Besides," said Codrington, "you drank whisky, and it is better to drink wine. The finest gentlemen who ever lived—I mean of course English gentlemen of the Georgian period—never drank spirit. The juice of the grape, good old port, was their wine of life."

Codrington lifted a glass of the same juice and held it up to the light.

"This is pretty good. I am sorry you won't join me, Luttrell."

He enlarged on the need of emotional experience. He was sure that the genius of English life was being slowly stifled by the atmosphere of conventional respectability which permeated every circle of society. In the old days respectability was a quality belonging exclusively to the middle classes—haberdashers, and small shopkeepers of all kinds. A gentleman and man of letters had nothing whatever to do with this bourgeois code of manners. In those days a gentleman was so sure of himself that he could enjoy the society of jockeys, stablemen, prize-fighters, peasants and private soldiers, good fellows, who come in touch with the natural things of life—sport, fighting, and mother earth—without for a moment losing his self-respect or dignity. A gentleman had such little need for asserting his rank and superiority that he could kiss a pretty chambermaid or have an evening's carouse in a country inn, or go out for a merry night with the Mohawks, turning over the old watchmen in their boxes,

or playing the amateur highwayman, without any loss of prestige or social caste. Now-a-days there was such a shuffling together of the various social grades, and a gentleman was so confoundedly nervous of being taken for a counter-jumper, that—curious paradox—he behaved exactly as if he were one, and led a respectable, colourless, uneventful life, which sapped his imagination, enervated his manhood, and made him as uninteresting as a tailor's dummy. The narrow life of the ordinary well-to-do man, said Codrington, is quite terrible. He marries because it is the right thing to do, and without having once felt the divine thrill of passion. He generally marries a wife as stupid as himself, and they have children more stupid than either of them. The wife gives "At-Homes" where more stupid people come to bore each other, and to be bored, the husband goes as regularly to his stupid club as a civil servant clerk to his office, and his ideas are strictly limited by the leading article in the *Morning Post* or some other dull paper which is on the exact level of his dull intellect.

"My dear Luttrell," said Codrington, solemnly, "where is the romance of life? Where is the mystery, the poetry, the passion, the adventure which men need to make them something more than respectable fatheads?"

Luttrell interrupted the monologue.

"It is all around one," he said. "I find it in every London street, and, to speak plainly, in my own heart—where there is more mystery and more adventure than I like."

"You have answered my question," said Codrington in his grave way. "You are indeed right. To the man who has a sensitive, imaginative soul, life is still full of poetry and adventure. But that sensibility and imagination must not be stifled. They must be watered and fertilised by the secret well-springs of emotion. They must

thrill to the passionate impulses of the human heart. They must not be deadened by the awful conventionalities of modern society. A man must go out seeking adventure, not afraid of himself, not timorous of venturing into strange by-ways, not fearful of raising the wine of life to his lips and drinking it to the dregs."

"Supposing there is poison in the cup?" said Frank, wincing at the memory of his own experience of the previous night.

"Oh, still drain it to the dregs," said Codrington, pouring himself out another glass of wine. "It is better to be poisoned than choked. A man who has never tasted poison never realises the true taste of nectar."

Luttrell was impatient with the man.

"Those are vague words," he said. "What do you mean by them? Do you mean that a man has a right to lead an immoral life, breaking women's hearts in order to satisfy his emotions and gain new experience, and to get drunk in order to understand the psychology of drunkenness?"

For a moment Codrington stared at him, and a slight flush crept into his handsome, pale face.

"You do me an injustice," he said. "Breaking women's hearts is not a pastime I advocate—though it is better perhaps to break a woman's heart than to go through life as a mere mummy, a body of dust, swathed in clothes. In a man's relationship to women he should always be a gentleman, and the true significance of that good word is not cruelty but sympathy, not a cold, selfish heart but one quick to respond to an appeal, quick to give, generous in all the gifts of the spirit. When I say that a man should know how to get drunk like a gentleman, I mean that he should allow his qualities of comradeship, geniality, and imagination to be stimulated in good company. There is something mean and miserable in a man who

drinks water while others are drinking wine. It is as though he would keep his emotions under strict lock and key, hugging them to himself like a miser with his gold."

"Last night," said Frank, "I did not drink water. I drank whisky—to the dregs—and a little while later I behaved as a bounder and lay in the filth of Fleet Street. What's the moral?"

"You are a better man for it," said Codrington, smiling. "It was a strange adventure, in which, if you could only see it, there was a mystical beauty. The Prodigal Son was a much more loveable person than his respectable brother. After eating husks with the swine he came back to his father's house, and his tears were like pearls of great price. Do you not understand? Tears and laughter, passion and remorse, despair and joy—all those emotions of the soul make up the music of life. The respectable man never sheds tears. He smiles, but he does not laugh; he regrets, but he does not despair. To him joy is something indecent and vulgar. He desires only to be comfortable. Believe me, respectability is another name for death. There can be no great virtues in men who are above the weaknesses of the flesh."

"You are too much of a pessimist," said Luttrell. "The Flesh and the Devil have not yet lost their hold on human nature."

Codrington quizzed his wine-glass.

"Perhaps you take me too seriously," he said.

Luttrell stared at him. This was truly an anti-climax.

"I believe it is all a part of your pose!" he said.

Codrington laughed and said, "My dear Luttrell, conversation would lose all its flowers if we were always quite sincere."

At the end of luncheon he insisted upon paying for Frank's meal, and with his somewhat theatrical air of consciousness and dignity would not allow this pleasure,

as he called it, to be denied him. But when Codrington pulled out his money he found that he had one shilling and sixpence and a few coppers. For a moment he was slightly embarrassed, but only for a moment. He called up the waiter to him, and said, "You will add this to my account, if you please."

The waiter hesitated. He was, strange to say, an Englishman, and belonged to an old-fashioned eating-house, in a narrow court off Fleet Street, which is popularly supposed to have been one of Dr. Johnson's haunts. Perhaps tradition had something to do with the discreet way in which he coughed behind his hand, and said, "Quite as you please, sir." When he helped Codrington on with his overcoat he took occasion to whisper a few words to him, and Luttrell heard Codrington reply, "My dear John, tell your good master to be patient and he shall be paid. If he is impatient I shall give my patronage elsewhere. Will you tell him that with my compliments?" He then poured some coppers into the waiter's hand, and adjusting his hat to the right angle, walked out with the elegant dignity of Count D'Orsay, the last of the Dandies.

On the following night Luttrell went again to the flat in Shaftesbury Avenue. He brought some spring flowers for Margaret Hubbard which he had gathered with his own hands in a cottage garden in Somersetshire. After his luncheon with Codrington he had been sent off to interview five octogenarians who lived in one village. As Luttrell travelled down to Somersetshire in an express from Paddington he stared out of the carriage window, and watched the fields flying past, and the woods, and the villages, and the sign-posts along the railway line, which told him at intervals that he was twenty, thirty, forty, fifty miles away from London. It was an afternoon in early spring, and bright sunshine chased

light shadows across the swiftly-moving panorama of the landscape. Every glimpse made a quick impression of movement, airiness, and a light-hearted hilarity of nature. It seemed to Luttrell as though the spirit of Spring were like a young girl he saw from the carriage window, running down to a wayside station with flying skirts. Fleecy clouds were scudding across the sky. Clothes hanging out to dry in cottage gardens were waving like banners in the wind. The brooks swollen by rain were rushing swiftly to the rivers. And the woods awakened from their winter sleep, and just putting on their palest green, swayed and tossed in the swift breezes. Frank gazed at the moving scenery and it had a curious effect upon him. He pulled down the carriage window—he was alone on the journey—and let the wind rush into his open mouth, into his eyes, and through his light brown hair.

"Oh!" he cried aloud. "This is cleansing!"

As mile after mile sped by, hurling him away from Fleet Street, it seemed to him that the dust and grime and squalor of London life were being swept out of his very soul by this sweet, strong wind which fanned his face, and came like spring-water into his lungs. Some touch of the old pantheistic ecstasy took possession of him. He put a hand out of the window and washed it in the clean, swift air. As the train went steadily into the heart of the southlands, he sat in his corner facing the sun and bathing in its light.

When he stepped out of the train on to the small wayside station and strode down a winding road towards the village, he was uplifted by a strange exhilaration. It seemed to him that he was like a man returning from war to the quiet sanctuary of his native place; behind him the memory of evil passions and fierce deeds, here, once more, the old homes under those thatched roofs, where

life is simple and where Time itself treads with a soft footfall. The thought was absurd, for he had been not much further than Fleet Street. But, although only a few months had passed since he had left the country for the town, his life as a journalist had changed him in that time, body and soul. He was thinner, and his face was no longer bronzed, and when he thought of himself as the assistant schoolmaster at King's Marshwood he seemed to be looking back across a gulf of years. Five months' wear and tear in Fleet Street make a lot of difference to a man with a temperament.

Frank enjoyed himself in a quiet way in the Somersetshire village. He found out the five old cronies, and adding up their combined ages found that it made a sum of four hundred and fifteen years. He found them all in a row in the taproom of the Montacute Arms. With toothless gums, but with eyes as bright as school-boys' eyes, and wrinkled old faces, tanned and weather-beaten, and curiously like the gargoyles on the tower of the village church, they told him stories of their young days, and repeated old jokes which had caused them to cackle with laughter, and dig each other with horny hands, for fifty years or more. One of them had been a serjeant in the Royal Fusiliers in the days of King William IV. He had been through the Crimean War and seen "a bit o' fighting," as he called it, in other "vurrin parts." But his strongest remembrance was, not the shock of battle and the bloody work of a bayonet charge, or the horrors of the trenches before Sebastopol, but the two rows of brass buttons which he used to wear on his tunic in the brave old days when he was a straight and proper lad.

"O dearie lor," said the old man. "How the gals did use to catch their hair in they gowd buttons, when they did use to zit on my knee on a zummer afternoon! Oh,

dearie lor, he! he! They did use to tangle their curls in they buttons o' mine!"

Sixty years had passed since old Jock had been a gay young dog with the girls. Perhaps one or two of these girls were now great-grandmothers. The others were dead and buried and forgotten, forgotten perhaps by everyone living except this old yokel with toothless gums who remembered how he had kissed them when their lips were ripe and sweet.

Frank wrote his "story" about the five octogenarians in the parlour of the Montacute Arms, and he was rather pleased with the humour and sentiment of it when he read it over to himself—and then went out for a walk in the cold night. As he strode along a good hard country road with his face to the wind, in which there was the sweet, subtle and rather intoxicating scent of the moist earth, he seemed to be walking further and further away from Fleet Street. The idea was rather haunting to him and he put on a good pace, and the lean, lithe figure sped swiftly along followed by his long shadow, thrown by the high moon upon the white road behind him. This was better than the streets of London, with their glaring lights and hurrying crowds and their strident, ceaseless noise. Here there was no sound but the steady beat of his own footsteps, no lights but the silver rays of the moon, and no other human soul but his own, which seemed to walk a little ahead of his body, so that he could stare at it and ask it questions. One question he asked, again and again, "Why go back?" And his soul said to him, "Don't go back. Leave all that squalor and turmoil and restlessness. Stay here, where the earth smells sweet and where a man may hear his heart beat."

So Frank walked on for nearly ten miles, and all the time he was tempted to go further and further away from the newspaper office where his spirit was being

crushed in the wheels of a soulless machine. He would take a country cottage, a labourer's cottage, on 1s. 6d. a week, and write books about nature, or fairy-tales for children, or novels which were grown-up fairy-tales for grown-up children. He would be his own master, and live quietly, and have time to read old masters again, and perhaps pick up some of his early ambitions, and remember some of the old day-dreams. Then suddenly he stopped, looked at his watch and turned back. He was going back to the village, but he knew also that he was going back to Fleet Street, and his footsteps lagged a little on the homeward journey.

He slept soundly that night in a bedroom with great beams above his head and panelled walls where rats played hide-and-seek. In the morning he forgot all his truant thoughts of the night before. His spirits were high, and he whistled an accompaniment to the birds whose spring songs came into his open window. He wondered what Katherine was doing at this hour; still in bed, no doubt, after a late night, with her pretty face on a white pillow; or perhaps sitting up to yawn and stretch her arms out to Mother Hubbard, who always, he knew, brought her up an early cup of tea. He would go round to them to-night and take some flowers to them.

The countryside was divine that morning with brilliant sunshine. But Frank, having given a cottager sixpence for a big bunch of "daffies," caught the first train up to town, and on the journey cursed it for its slowness in taking him back to Fleet Street.

He was disappointed at not finding either Katherine or Margaret at the office. Katherine had gone off in quest of an Italian princess who had married her groom and was reported to be living at Maidenhead, and Margaret had sent a note to say that she was sneezing three times a minute and thought it decent to hide herself for a day.

Frank loitered through the afternoon with very little to do, and then, after a cheap supper, took his daffodils from a tumbler on his table in Staple Inn and went out with them to Shaftesbury Avenue.

Margaret Hubbard was alone in her room, and as he went in she was seated at the piano playing in a soft, dreamy way. She was in a black dress covered with a kind of gauze or netting, and her face was illumined by the candles on the piano, the room being otherwise in darkness. Frank had been let into the flat by the old woman who did the "charing" and he now stood quietly inside the room watching Margaret, who was unaware of his presence. Some people called Margaret Hubbard "plain," but, for the first time, he was impressed by the spiritual beauty of that strong, womanly face, upon which the candlelight shed a soft glamour. Her fingers were striking chords very quietly and tenderly until suddenly they stopped, and Margaret Hubbard spread her arms out upon the keys and laid her head upon them. Frank was startled. It seemed as if she were crying, or that in touching one of the chords she had stirred her own heart-strings, awakening some old memory which had made her bow her head swiftly. He wondered whether he should steal out of the room. He had been a cad to come in so silently. A man has no right to come unawares upon a woman in her loneliness. He stood quite still for a second, but Margaret seemed to become aware of some presence in that mysterious way which reveals one human being to another in the dark.

"Is anybody here?" she said quietly, lifting her head.

Frank stepped forward.

"Yes, Frank Luttrell. . . . I'm sorry, Mother Hubbard. You did not hear me when I came in, a moment ago."

She turned on the electric light, and laughed when she

said, "I thought it was a ghost. I'm jolly glad it's a nice boy who has come to keep me company."

There was a gleam of moisture in her eyes as she smiled at him, but Frank was relieved to hear her cheery voice, and to see her face as quiet and calm as usual.

"It is a foolish thing to indulge in waking-dreams in the dark," she said. "But tell me how are you, and what have you been doing with yourself? Katherine told me you were in the grips of influenza. If so, it seems to suit you."

"It wasn't influenza," said Frank. "It was—something else."

He did not tell her then; but later in the evening he made his confession to her and described how he had got "beastly drunk" at the club. He made one reservation; he did not tell Margaret Hubbard how Codrington had knocked him down in Fleet Street.

Margaret listened to his story quietly. She did not reproach him or show any disgust at his "beastliness" as he called it. But in her own common-sense way she told him some of the things she knew, as an experienced woman.

"That sort of thing doesn't pay in the long run. . . . The club has a bad influence on many young men who come into Fleet Street. It is handy to their offices, of course, and it is pleasant to go over the way and warm themselves up with a whisky or two while they are waiting for a job. But it grows into a habit, and without getting really drunk they take more whisky than is good for them. . . . I think many of the boys begin to drink out of a spirit of adventure. The clink of the glasses is merry music to them, and they find their tongues are loosened, and they say witty and wild things, and for an hour or two enjoy the sense of being Bohemian. Isn't that it?"

"That's it," said Frank. "Bohemia is a tradition."

"It is a bad old tradition," said Margaret. "I hate the word. I know middle-aged men who go once a week in evening dress to 'Bohemian' clubs where they repeat stale old stories which they would be ashamed to tell their wives, and make themselves fuddled, and then go home by tram to Streatham Hill, or somewhere, afraid to face the poor wife who is waiting up for them. There's not much romance about that, is there?"

"Precious little," said Frank.

She thought there was more excuse for journalists than for any other men. But it was not less pitiful. She had known brilliant fellows ruined in body and soul because they were not strong enough to stand against the temptation. They had begun by sauntering into refreshment bars while waiting for railway trains. They had ended by slinking down side streets ashamed to meet one of their old comrades, or, worse still, cringing and whining for the loan of a shilling.

"Frank," she said, putting her hand on his sleeve, "remember Edmund Grattan. He has got a golden heart. He is a brilliant writer. He might have been a great and distinguished man. But his one weakness drags him down, and every now and again he has to pick himself up from the mire and try to build up a new self-respect. That good, brave, generous-hearted little Irishman is a warning to all young journalists."

Frank had not told Margaret Hubbard that it was Grattan who had been his companion on the disastrous night, and he kept that part of the story to himself. But he told her something about his conversation with Codrington, and he was surprised at the agitation it caused her.

"Frank," she said, "what is to be the end of it—this business between Christopher and Katherine?"

Frank was silent. He had waited a long time for this moment when Margaret would tell him how things stood between Katherine and Codrington. He might have asked a hundred times, but he had been tongue-tied. Now he was afraid to hear the truth.

"I do not know the beginning yet," he said.

"Hasn't Codrington told you?" she asked. "Well, I think I admire him for that. It all happened gradually, and I think I was most to blame. You see, when Katherine first came to Fleet Street she was like a wild rose, so fresh and so fragrant. Chris Codrington fell in love with her at once. He found it too easy to fall in love. For a time I encouraged him. He used to come and tell me how much he loved her, and used such pretty words and was so handsome and ardent, that I, who have never been loved like that, used to envy Kitty. You know how foolish we women are! Katherine laughed at him at first. She used to think it very funny and quite nice to have such a tall, handsome young man as a cavalier. I must say Chris Codrington played the game very gallantly. He spent quite a lot of money on theatre tickets and outings up the river, and excursions to Richmond Park, and so on. One day I found Katherine sitting on the floor with her head on the cushions of that chair crying her heart out. Then I knew that something had happened. She said that Chris had kissed her in a hansom cab, and that she had promised to be his wife. For a moment my heart leaped up. I was so glad that Kitty was not going to grow old alone. But when I saw she was crying I wondered, and became rather troubled. Then she confessed that she did not love Christopher a bit, that she only thought it good fun to have him as a friend, and that she would never marry a poor man, and live at Brixton, and have babies, and become a drudge

for a journalist husband who stayed out late at night. She would rather die."

Margaret smiled at the recollection, in spite of her anxiety for the girl whom she had mothered so long.

"You know our Katherine. She talks with the candor of a child sometimes—even now—but then she was younger."

Margaret had asked her why she had not told all that to Codrington and she said she had, and he had behaved in such a gentlemanly way that she began to think she did love him a little bit after all. He said that he was in no hurry to marry, and that he quite agreed with her as to the horror of married life on a small income in the suburbs. All he wanted was her promise to wait for him. He was going to write a big novel, and when that came out he was going to leave Fleet Street and take a country house and live like a gentleman. He was quite sure that he could make a success as a novelist and beat Hall Caine and Marie Corelli out of the field. Would she wait for him and inspire him by the thought of her love, or would she break his heart and make it impossible for him to fulfill his ambition? Katherine was touched. She had not the heart to ruin this great literary career, and blight a sensitive spirit. So they had remained engaged for eighteen months.

"How about the novel?" said Frank. He spoke quite calmly, but he knew that later he would suffer in remembering this story. It would make the world go very grey for him.

"Oh, it came out," said Margaret. "It was not a success financially, but most of the critics praised it."

"And what is the state of affairs now—I mean between Katherine and Codrington?"

Margaret was thoughtful.

"I hardly know," she said presently. "If I ask Kitty

to break off the engagement, she says, 'Why should I? We are good chums.' If I ask her when I am to buy the wedding cake she says, 'I am never going to marry a journalist and a poor man, little mother.' Lately she has become rather fretful, rather bitter sometimes. I think she sees that the day may come when she is no longer young, and when Codrington is still a journalist and a poor man, or when a middle-aged marriage would be rather prosaic and joyless."

"I am sorry," said Frank. "I am very sorry."

There was distress in his voice, but he had that habit of repressing any evident signs of emotion, which belongs to reserved self-conscious men.

Margaret suddenly put her hand on Luttrell's knee, and said in a breaking voice, "Frank, I would give a good deal to see Katherine safely married."

"Yes," said Frank, "yes."

It seemed to him that Margaret was making some direct appeal to him. It was as though she were asking for his help on behalf of Katherine. He answered quietly.

"I don't see what can be done."

"I put Katherine's happiness first," said Margaret. "We must all do that. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Frank, "yes."

Margaret was looking at him, rather anxiously it seemed, rather searchingly. He avoided those steady brown eyes, and taking her hand put his lips to it.

"Mother Hubbard," he said, "you never think of your own happiness. One of these days your knight will come riding down the street and carry you off, and then we shall be left all forlorn."

She laughed in her quiet way.

"I had a dream-knight once, like all women. He was something like you, Frank, with square shoulders, and a clean-shaven face and light brown hair that curled a

little." She looked up at him, and her eyes lingered upon him with a kind of smiling wistfulness. "Now he has vanished into thin air, and I know that I am one of the old maids of life."

She sighed and then rose and stirred the fire into the flames vigorously, determinedly.

"How's that for a blaze? A single woman can get a good deal of fun out of the old world, Frank, if she keeps a warm fire, a warm heart and a sense of humour."

A little later Edmund Grattan came in, and the room rang with laughter. It was only by a squeeze of the hand, and a quiet, humorous glance that Frank knew he remembered the night at the club. He was in good spirits, and told some delightfully droll stories. Frank left the flat after half-an-hour of them, and as he closed the hall door behind him and went down the dark stairs, he raised his hand to a throbbing forehead. He repeated the words he had said to Margaret Hubbard when she had told him about Codrington. "I am sorry. I am very sorry." They were feeble words, but when a man speaks to his own heart he is not as a rule eloquent, nor does he use long and polished phrases. "I am sorry, very sorry," said Frank Luttrell to the little black kitten which came purring up to him when he opened the door of his own rooms at Staple Inn, and he gave a queer, melancholy laugh as he turned up the light and saw on his table a half sheet of note-paper on which he had scribbled some lines "To a Lady."

CHAPTER XII

BRANDON, the murder specialist, went away to York 'Assizes for a great trial which was likely to last two or three weeks. Before leaving Fleet Street he took Luttrell on one side and asked him to keep a friendly eye on Peg.

"The poor girl is already beginning to fret. I should be deeply grateful, Luttrell, if you could call on her now and again, to keep her cheerful. Otherwise, I am afraid ——" He shrugged his shoulders and said, "You know what I mean."

Frank was not fascinated by the commission. He was nervous of that extraordinary girl with the big eyes and bow-lipped mouth. But he had old-fashioned notions about friendship, and it did not occur to him to shirk this duty, however unpleasant it might be.

Brandon said, "I know I may rely on your discretion. I don't want any of the boys to get wind of the story. After all, my private life is my own."

"Why not tell Margaret Hubbard?" said Frank. "She would help the girl a good deal."

Brandon flushed, and said—

"No, not yet. Maggie Hubbard is the most broad-minded girl I have ever met, but as a Catholic, like all the Hubbards, she has her convictions, from which she does not budge an inch, and I am sure she would try to make me put Peg away. Perhaps that would be best for both of us if I could get some good soul to look after her, but I haven't the heart to send the girl to a home. You

know what a 'home' is! She would either pine away and die or run away and go to the bad for ever."

Frank said no more about the matter, but when Brandon had gone he called several times at the flat and spent an hour or two with Peg. The girl was grateful to him, and he was struck with pity at her mournfulness. As much to employ her time and keep her from brooding as to educate her in an elementary way, Brandon had set her a number of lessons, and Frank found her doing copy-book exercises in a laborious round hand, and learning pieces of poetry by heart in order to acquire a correct pronunciation. She was also doing some drawings from models—flower-pots, tea-pots, vases and other common objects—and Frank saw that she had a real and natural talent in this direction. In addition to her educational course—which included the rules of English grammar, and first lessons in history—she had plenty of needle-work to do. She was darning a number of Brandon's socks—it seemed to Frank that Brandon must have bought a job lot and deliberately made holes in them in order that Peg might have work to do—and she was making six pairs of pyjamas for him. At none of these tasks, except drawing, did she show any aptitude. Her copybooks were blotted and smudged. It looked as if some of the blots had been made by tears. She held her needle in a way that showed to Frank—who had watched his mother at work a thousand times—that she was no good needle-woman. The socks were cobbled in a rough and ready way, and though sometimes she kissed them when she spoke of Brandon, Frank thought that to wear a pair of socks darned in such a way would be a torture worse than walking on split peas.

But the girl interested him intensely, and he saw that Brandon, desiring to be kind, had been very cruel in his method of redemption. The girl was like a trapped bird,

a wild thing with a fluttering heart, put into the narrow prison of a London flat. All her life until now she had been at liberty—a liberty without law of any kind. From childhood to womanhood (she was only twenty-one) she had been out in the London streets selling flowers—and other wares. Brandon had rescued her from an evil life and surroundings, but he had also destroyed her liberty, and that, to some human hearts, is the breath of life. She suffocated in this small flat. Once she actually beat her head against the wall and thumped it with her hands until they were all bruised. Sometimes she felt tempted to smash up the furniture and tear the curtains to pieces. Once when Brandon was away she did seize the poker and shatter a big gilt mirror over the drawing-room mantelpiece because the sight of her own face every time she crossed the room made her feel quite frenzied. She had not meant to break the mirror. She had really struck at the reflection of her own face with the big, melancholy eyes, which seemed to stare at her and drag her head round to look into the glass, though she tried to avoid that image of herself. She told all these things simply to Frank Luttrell, as simply as a child who has been naughty and looks back on its misdeeds with the kind of fatalistic belief of childhood that these things are inevitable and beyond its own control. Frank urged her to go out to walk in Battersea Park every day, as a duty to herself and Brandon, and to go up to town and see the shops. He offered even to take her to the theatre—a half-a-crown seat in the pit where they would be unobserved. But the girl explained to him rather piteously that she dared not go out alone. If she went only so far as the pillar-box to post a letter to Brandon, she was tormented by the fear of meeting one of her old companions. Once or twice she had gone for a walk in the park, but all the time she thought she was being followed. She

heard footsteps behind her. She fancied she heard some one call out her name, and she had been so terrified that she had hurried swiftly along, until at the sight of the park gates she ran like a hunted thing home to the flat.

Frank was perplexed. It would never do for the girl to remain always in the stuffy flat, her only companion when Brandon was away being an old charwoman who came in to light the fires, cook the meals, and clean up. No wonder the girl was getting morbid and hysterical, and losing control over herself. No wonder her eyes seemed to be getting bigger, and her cheek-bones more prominent, and the touch of colour on them more vivid. If she were to be saved from an utter breakdown she would have to be out into the open air. Brandon in taking her away from her low companions had not given her others to take their place, and he himself was away constantly. Frank was beginning to feel angry and bitter against the man. Brandon had been merely selfish. Yet he had made himself believe that he was doing something noble and self-sacrificing in saving this girl from a vicious life. He was using her merely as the victim of his own craving for penance and redemption. But both Brandon's ideas were false. He was not saving the girl. He was destroying her. He was not working out his own salvation. He was merely substituting one sin for another.

Frank sometimes wondered whether Peg had a real love and passion for the man. It was true that she kissed his socks, and spoke of him in words of adoration as though he were some angel of God who had stooped down to lift her up, but it seemed sometimes as if she was afraid of him, and as if her reverence were that of an Oriental slave-girl to her lord and master. Frank remembered the scene when she had gone down on her knees to Brandon with the coffee-tray. Whenever she

spoke of him she seemed to go down, in spirit, on her knees. There was no sense of equality between the man and woman in this unconventional ménage.

She asked Frank to help her with her lessons, and whenever she made a mistake she would cry out in a scared way that Brandon would be displeased with her because she made such slow progress. She would repeat her pieces of poetry to him, and when at almost every word he would try to correct her vowels, or her intonation, she would end by bursting into tears, and say that she would never be able to speak like a "lidy," and it would be better for Brandon to give her up as hopeless. She would never be worthy of him. He would always be ashamed of her before his friends.

Frank soothed her down, and in his simple, rather boyish way, he made her laugh and forget her troubles for a while. One Saturday he induced her to go out with him. They went round Battersea Park. It was a sunny afternoon, and there was a beautiful show of spring flowers in the beds—hyacinths, daffodils and crocuses of delicate colour-harmonies. Peg was enchanted during the first half-hour, and with her hand on Frank's arm she wandered round the paths gazing at the beauty of the flowers with almost hungry eyes. She told him how in "the old days"—they could not have been very far away—she used to buy "daffies" like these in Covent Garden, and sell them in Cheapside to City gentlemen. When luck was good she earned as much as two shillings a day clear profit, but on rainy days she would sometimes be left with half her stock unsold, and then she hated to see the poor things wither. They were seldom any good for a second day though she used to "fake" them up a bit.

While they were walking round Luttrell suddenly felt Peg's hand grip his arm, and she said, "Who's that?"

in a scared voice. It was Quin, the dramatic critic, with a small boy bowling a hoop by his side. He lifted his hat to Luttrell, and seemed inclined to stop and speak. Peg let go of Frank's arm and went quickly over to a flower bed, pretending to be absorbed in its beauty.

"Hulloh, Luttrell!" said Quin. "Didn't know you lived in this part of the world."

"I don't," said Frank, "as a matter of fact." For the life of him he could not resist blushing when Quin looked across at Peg in a quizzing way, and said, "I see—out for a walk with your best girl."

"Is that your boy?" said Frank.

It was a happy inspiration for changing the subject. Quin immediately presented his son, aged six, and remarked in an aside, that the boy was as bright a little devil as the sun smiled on. "He keeps me young," said Quin. "You have no idea how much it adds to your life if you have to tell fairy-tales in bed in the morning, and play at steam-engines on a Saturday afternoon, and drive imaginary motor-cars from London to Edinburgh on a Sunday morning. Believe me, Luttrell, art, letters, drama, and that sort of bosh don't add a ha'poth of joy to life. This is the real thing—domestic happiness, a small boy to romp with. There's nothing like it in life."

He looked over at Peg.

"God bless you!" he said. "Go and do likewise."

He went off humming a song, hand-in-hand with a little replica of himself.

Peg came back to Frank, and said she thought she had better be going home as there were so many people about. He persuaded her to stay a little longer in the sunshine, but her pleasure seemed to have gone, and she continually looked round in a timid way, as if some one might be following them. She referred several times to the encounter with Quin, and asked Frank whether he thought

the man had noticed anything queer about her. Frank reassured her. The only thing about her, he said, was her good looks. "You know, Peg," he said, "you are a very beautiful young person. Don't you know that?"

She smiled. No daughter of Eve can resent such words; but tears came quickly into her eyes when she said that her good looks, if she had any, had done nothing but harm to her.

The second time Frank took her for a walk he had a strange and painful experience. They went as far as Lambeth Bridge on the way to the Tate Gallery, which Frank thought would be a great treat to her as she had such a love of pictures. But they had been rather late in setting out, and it was dusk when they reached the bridge. "I am afraid the Gallery will be closed," said Frank, regretfully. But Peg did not hear him. She had stopped half-way across the bridge, and was gazing down the river towards Westminster and to the lights of London gleaming along the river side.

"Oh, my Gord!" she said in a kind of whisper.

"What's the matter, Peg?" said Frank.

She turned round with a white face, and in hysterical words vowed that she would never go back to the flat at Battersea. The sight of the great city again was too much. It was not fair to tempt her like this. Bad as the old life was it was better than stifling to death in four rooms. Brandon despised her. He only kept her out of pity. She didn't blame him for being ashamed of her and hiding her from his friends, but she couldn't bear it any longer. It was driving her mad—driving her to drink.

Frank reasoned with her. Brandon had not "hidden" her from him at least. He had not been ashamed to introduce him to her; and were they not very good friends?

Were they not going to have a very pleasant tea together at a bun-shop, with hot muffins and fancy cakes?

The girl gave a kind of convulsive shiver and turned her head away from the lights of London over Westminster and the City. She put her hand on Frank's arm and said in a low, husky voice that he was a true pal to her, and he mustn't mind if she was "took a bit queer" at times.

Frank was genuinely moved by the girl's unhappy situation and distress of mind. He determined to speak to Brandon seriously about her when he came back. It was obviously impossible that she could go on leading this life. She was too utterly cut off from all companionship and from all the duties and stimulus of a working life. She could think too much while she was darning socks and sewing up pyjamas and reading fairy-tales in words of one syllable. It seemed to him that the only cure for the girl would be to get her some employment, some position where she could earn enough to give her a sense of independence, and, what was more essential, a sense of self-respect. But what could she do? Utterly uneducated it was difficult to think of any position suitable to her. She was hardly the sort of girl to recommend as a nursery maid with the care of children. In fact, it was inconceivable to think of her in domestic service of any kind. Her startling type of beauty would scare any suburban housewife, and her manner of speech would arouse curiosity and suspicions in the least imaginative mind. Then, too, who would provide her with a "character"? Frank sighed. Peg had no character according to the definition of an employment agency.

One thing he felt bound to do, for the sake of the woman's soul which he could not abandon to its own misery. He was determined that until Brandon came back—and he had never longed for any one's return so

ardently before—he would devote as much of his time as possible to keeping Peg company. He realised clearly enough that she was grateful beyond words for his society, and if he could but steal one half-hour a day to visit her, he kept her away from that terrible temptation which always seemed to be creeping near to her—the desire to drink herself into oblivion.

As it happened by good fortune—it appeared good fortune to him at the time—he was not sent out of town during these weeks upon any mission which kept him away a night; and not a day passed without his being able to take a cab from Victoria across Battersea Bridge to the block of mansions where he knew Peg would be listening for the sound of wheels.

This disposal of his leisure hours led to an embarrassment which threatened to become of grave consequence to his own happiness and peace of mind. He was first made aware of this by a question from Katherine. They were alone together one morning in the reporter's room, for the first time since she had dosed him with quinine a fortnight before.

"Frank," she said, looking up from her desk, "will you give me a plain answer to a straight question?"

"Why, yes," he said cheerfully. "I can fairly say I have never funk'd doing that with anyone. Ask away."

Katherine swung round on her chair a little so that her face was in profile to his. He fancied that the rose-tint on her cheek had deepened.

"Why don't you come round to the flat now. Are you offended with—us—about anything?"

Frank saw in a second that a pit was being dugged for him. He could not remember having told a lie in his life. Truth came naturally to him. And Katherine was the last girl in the world that he would deceive by a shadow of dissimulation. He saw whither her question was lead-

ing. She would ask him where he was spending his evenings, and by his pledge to Brandon he was, in honour bound, forbidden to reply. What should he do? In a flash all this came to his mind and he was panic-stricken.

It was in a strained voice that he said, "Good lord, no! Offended! What an idea!"

Then the fatal question came—which he knew would come.

"What are you doing with yourself, then, every evening? Why don't you come round sometimes? Mother Hubbard is quite hurt about it."

Frank felt himself go rather white.

"To tell you the truth," he said—then he stopped, for a lie was trembling on his lips and he was afraid of it.

"Yes?" said Katherine.

Frank changed his sentence.

"Mother Hubbard must not feel hurt," he said. "I shall always be tremendously grateful to her—and to you, for all you have done for me."

Katherine laughed in a queer voice.

"That sounds as if you were taking a sad farewell of us. Are you never coming to the flat again?"

"I should rather think I am," said Frank. "If you will have me," he added with humility.

"If we will have you! . . . You will come to-night, then? Quin will be there with some new songs of his."

"I should love to," said Frank. But he remembered that he had promised Peg to be with her at seven if nothing happened to take him out late. That proviso had always to be made. "Unfortunately, however, I cannot manage it this evening."

"To-morrow?" said Katherine.

"Yes, to-morrow—perhaps." He said it with hesitation, and went hot and cold. If only Brandon had not tied his tongue! But he must go through with his task.

He must not forsake poor Peg, who was on the edge of a horrible precipice.

"Only perhaps?" said Katherine reproachfully.

Frank twisted uneasily in his chair.

"I am afraid it must be only perhaps," he said gravely. "I have some private business which is tying my hands just at present."

"I see," said Katherine.

He saw that she did not see, and that she was hurt or angry. She bent over her desk and wrote swiftly for a few minutes. Then in a very friendly and sweet little voice she said some words which brought the colour flaming to his face.

"By the bye, Quin said he met you in Battersea Park last Saturday with a beautiful girl with big eyes and bow lips. The type is rather unusual, isn't it?"

"What type?"

"The Burne-Jones type."

"Is it?" asked Frank. "Yes, I suppose it is."

"Quin was very much struck."

"It is a pity Quin doesn't mind his own business," said Frank rather hotly. Then he repented of his folly, for he had emphasised the very thing he wanted to slur over—the secret of the girl with the Burne-Jones face.

It was Katherine's turn to get hot.

"I take that as a hint that I am not minding my business," she said. "Pray don't think that I am in the least inquisitive."

"I don't think so," said Frank quietly. "I know you will always have the kindest heart and the gift of comradeship."

He spoke the words so emotionally that Katherine was a little startled, even a little afraid. Her long brown lashes drooped over her eyes and she laid a burning cheek

on one hand, as she leant on her elbow on the desk pretending to be intent on her work.

"Do you mind if I go on writing?" she said politely. "We both seem to be talking foolishly this afternoon."

It was the telephone that saved the situation for Frank. He sprang to it alertly, and told Vicary over the wire that he would go upstairs at once. He was sent off to White-chapel to describe a social "at-Home" at Toynbee Hall, and on the way he cursed Quin for having talked about Peg. He saw quite clearly that Katherine's suspicions were aroused. Perhaps she and Mother Hubbard—he put the thought away from him as a painful thing, but there was a scared look on his face when he thought that it would be impossible to explain how and where he spent his evenings. What did not occur to him, having a boyish and simple mind unused to the subtleties of womanhood, was that Katherine Halstead revealed a trace of jealousy in her reference to the girl in the park. A man with more experience might have found a little comfort in that. But Frank was horribly uncomfortable and felt that both Katherine and Margaret had a right to be offended with him, as undoubtedly they were. Curiously enough also, he had an uneasy feeling that he was doing something "caddish" and dishonorable in thus hiding his movements from two women who had admitted him into the delightful sanctuary of their rooms. Like all truthful and simple men, he felt that secrecy was an unnatural thing.

To his deep annoyance and embarrassment, he found on the following day that Christopher Codrington had heard of the strange girl whom Quin had seen walking with him on Saturday afternoon. The dramatic critic seemed to have exaggerated the appearance of Peg which was naturally striking, and Codrington had a mental vision of a girl with a swan-neck, sapphire eyes, and lips

like Cupid's bow. Codrington's own lips were curved into a slightly satirical smile when he congratulated Luttrell on having the acquaintance of so original a lady, and then he used a phrase which brought the blood to Frank's face. "I am glad," he said, "that you are gaining experience of life. It is only when a man's pulse has thrilled to passionate impulses, that he graduates in the university of letters."

"I wish to heaven you wouldn't talk sky-bosh, Codrington," he said angrily.

"Hush!" said Codrington. "You may trust to my discretion. Among men of honour——"

He gave another of his pale smiles and slightly lowered one eyelid.

"Look here, Codrington," said Frank, "I shall be much obliged if you will drop the subject."

"Certainly," said Codrington. "Not another word, my dear fellow."

Perhaps Frank would have done well to realise more quickly the danger of the situation—the danger that always exists in unconventional relationships between men and women, according to the experience of the world, as suggested by Codrington's flicker of an eyelid. On the other hand, a painful scene which took place in the flat in Battersea Park was not to the blame of a man who had devoted himself unselfishly to the safeguarding of a woman's soul. It was the night before Brandon's return home, when Frank would be able to relinquish his extraordinary task. He found Peg in a state of more than usual nervous excitement. Strangely enough the thought that Brandon would be with her within twenty-four hours did not fire her with that joy which Frank had expected after all her wailings at his absence. She was silent and her eyes were very wistful, and as though she had been weeping for hours. Then she reproached

herself, passionately, for her own stupidity and broke down when she said that Brandon would find no improvement in her, that she had done all her lessons badly, and that she would never be any better.

"Hush, Peg," said Frank, "you must learn a little patience. In another couple of years you will be such an elegant lady that I shall be scared of you."

She slipped down on to the ground and put her hands upon his knees and her face on to her hands. She was crying.

Frank was horribly ill at ease. He had never seen a woman weep before, and never before had a woman put her head upon his knees.

"Peg! Peg!" he said. "Get up and sit in a chair, and let us talk sensibly."

The girl raised her head, and still knelt before him.

"Oh, my Gord! If only I'd been a good woman."

"God made you a beautiful one, and you are going to be very good."

She got up slowly and rubbed her eyes with the back of her hands, so that Frank was reminded of the coster-girl whom he sometimes forgot when looking at this strange creature.

She vowed that so far from being good she felt she was going to be very wicked. Sometimes she thought the devil was in her heart telling her to go to the bad, whispering evil things in her ears. She had not been troubled so much with that lately until to-night again. Frank had been very kind to her. She felt "at home" with him. Brandon always made her feel afraid, he made her feel that he was a thousand miles above her, and that she was just dirt at his feet. But Frank had been more of a pal. He talked to her just as if she could read and write and speak like a lady. He did not wince every time she

dropped an "h." He had made her laugh, and she thought laughter was the best thing in the world.

Suddenly she stretched out her hands to him and called his name twice. "Frank! Frank!" and then said, "Oh, my Gord!" and again, "Oh, my Gord!"

Frank rose from his chair. There was something in her eyes which scared him.

"What is the matter?"

She half stumbled forward and put her arm round his neck, and tried to draw his head towards her. She said she loved him. She couldn't help it. She was a bad woman, and she ought to be killed, especially after what Brandon had done for her. But Frank had been "that kind" to her she couldn't bear the thought of his going away, and not coming back, now that Brandon would be home. Couldn't she go with him? She would work her fingers to the bone for him, and she wouldn't let the devil whisper bad things in her ears. If only he would let her stay with him and make her laugh sometimes, she would keep off the drink and be a good girl.

Frank thrust her back, almost roughly.

"Peg!" he said. "I am ashamed of you. How dare you talk like that?"

She raised her hand as though to ward off a blow. It was the instinctive action of a girl who had been struck by brutal men, and Frank's heart was melted with a great pity, and all his anger vanished. This girl had been brought out of the underworld and she was not to be judged by the ordinary moral code. She sank down on a sofa rocking herself to and fro, moaning piteously, and uttering incoherent words of self-abasement.

It was an hour before Frank could calm her down and make her laugh, though he had spoken between jest and earnest all that time. He did not go before she had promised not to say any more silly things and to wait

like a good girl for Brandon. On his side Frank promised that he would speak to Brandon and persuade him to put her into some position where she could earn a living, and enjoy liberty without going back to the old ways.

When he left she had brightened up, and at the door of the flat she bent down and covered his hand with kisses.

Frank Luttrell had played the game with real courage, not less courageously because, while he had soothed that girl with cheerful and consoling words, he had been more frightened than ever in his life before. When she had put her arm about his neck and spoken passionate and imploring words to him he had gone quite faint with fear and horror. It was an awful thought to him that in trying to fulfill a pledge of friendship with Brandon and to save this girl from hysteria—and worse things—he had risked the loss of honour and had plunged into a melodrama which might even now have sensational developments of a most unpleasant character. Peg's outburst of passion had scorched him. She had panted like some beautiful animal when she had put her arms about him, and her breath had been hot on his face. Then like a child she had quietened down and cried over his hands and kissed them.

He shuddered. What would happen if Brandon found out? He had laid himself open to the most awful accusation which one man may make to another. Like other men who, in trying to do good, have burnt their fingers, Frank Luttrell vowed that never again would he play the part of a philanthropist, or pose as a doctor of women's souls. But it was too late to make this resolution as far as Peg was concerned, and there was to be another chapter to the story.

CHAPTER XIII

LUTTRELL had been on the *Rag* six months, and his knowledge of the inner workings of a newspaper office was no longer limited to the reporters' room. He had breathed the more rarefied air of the editorial department. He had gone with hesitating tread into the presence of the chief leader-writer. He had become friendly with the literary editor. He was even admitted into the confidence of the composing-room.

It was in the last place that he learnt the real secrets of this great machine of which he was but one small wheel revolving in a narrow groove. He had first introduced himself to those men in white aprons when he had sneaked upstairs in the hope of getting a proof of one of his articles which he had written in a jolting railway train, so illegibly that he knew even a printer's reader would be baffled by it. It was an unconstitutional act to apply for a proof without the news-editor's permission, but the man from whom he begged this favour with due humility was gracious.

"I don't mind obliging a gent like you, sir," he said, shovelling some snuff into his nose and offering it to Luttrell, who took a small pinch and sneezed violently three times.

"Why like me?" said Frank.

"Well, I don't mind saying as how I like your articles, Mr. Luttrell. You've got a bright touch, and see things with your eyes open."

"It's very good of you to say so," said Frank, feeling that this was praise from Olympian heights.

"Well, I dare say you think I've no call to say so," said the friendly comp, "but I reckon I know what literature is, seeing as I was brought up on the Bible, Shakespeare, *Paradise Lost*, and George R. Sims."

"Who was George R. Sims?" asked Frank, feeling that his education had been woefully neglected.

The man was astounded. "Don't know George R. Sims? Never read *The Signalman's Daughter*?"

"No," said Frank.

"Strike me pink! Why him and Shakespeare are the great 'umanists. What them two don't know about 'uman nature ain't 'umanity. I made sure you'd studied him. You've got just the same touch. The throb of the 'eart in your copy, so to speak. My old woman says 'that young feller who writes them descriptive articles is a fair cough-drop.' She says she could just 'ug you, sir, though she's never set eyes on you."

"I am sure I should be delighted to hug your good lady," said Luttrell pleasantly, "that is, if you had no objection."

The man chuckled prodigiously while he shovelled more snuff into his nose.

"I see you've got a sense of 'umour," he said, while he went on putting the brasses between lines of type, with extraordinary deftness. "I wouldn't be surprised if you play cricket, neither."

"I used to," said Frank, "at Oxford. I don't get a chance now."

"Oh, that's a pity. You can divide up the world in two 'alves. Them as plays cricket and them as don't. The last sort are all blighters. I always try to get a game of a Saturday on Camberwell Green, with my boy. . . . So you've been to Oxford, 'ave you? Ah! I thought so, by the look of you. You've got the Oxford manner."

"What's it like?" said Frank, genuinely amused by this man in a white apron who spoke without the slightest deference, yet without any suggestion of insolence or over-familiarity.

"Oh, you can't define it. It's a jer-nez-say-quah, as my son calls it. . . . I've a son as Article Sixty-Eight in an elementary school. That boy would surprise you with his knowledge. French and Latin are mere play-things to him."

This conversation was the beginning of a friendship which was not without interest to Frank. Mr. Morewood—the men always called each other "Mr.," though they spoke of the editor as "little Bellamy," and the news-editor as "old Vicary"—introduced him to some of his fellow compositors who were glad to have proofs pulled for him whenever he wanted them, and to hold brief conversations with him on politics, literature, cricket, or the domestic economy, of the *Rag*, while they worked with fingers which seemed bewitched. Frank occasionally stood one or two of them a glass of beer at a tavern in a side-street, and once went to tea with John Morewood at Camberwell, where he was introduced to a nice motherly woman, who asked anxiously whether he wore flannel next to the skin, and to the youth of eighteen whom he found to be an intelligent Cockney, proud of an education above the people of his own class, and very patronising to his parents, who regarded him with awe, but a bright-eyed, clean-hearted, good-tempered boy. Codrington was astounded to hear that Frank had gone to tea with a "comp," although Codrington himself would stand at the bar any day with sporting men not nearly so respectable. But he thought the line ought to be drawn somewhere and he drew it unswervingly between the composing-room and the second floor.

Frank found that the compositors made him think bet-

ter of the world. Sturdy men, engaged in a hard and unhealthy occupation which reversed the order of nature so that they slept during the day and worked at night, men who had come from the north and south—there were few real Cockneys among them—they had a dignity and a solidity of character which inspired him with admiration. Most of them were married and had large families. He found that if he allowed them to speak of their wives and children he at once made them his firm and grateful friends. Safeguarded by trade union rules they had a sense of independence which gave them an independence of manner, and the composing-room was a kind of free republic governed by an elected representative called the Father of the Chapel, endowed with temporal and spiritual powers before which the mightiest editor trembled. The men themselves working at the top of the building looked down upon the lower floors with editors, reporters, and the whole staff of pressmen, like gods gazing down upon the little wriggling figures of humanity on the ant-heap of the world. They took a benevolent interest in their wriggling. They distinguished one ant from another. They sympathised with their struggles and strivings. But they had an attitude of sublime detachment from all this turmoil, knowing that they were the arbiters of fate. If a reporter failed with his copy there were a dozen articles in the rack to take its place. If the editor were to be killed in Fleet Street the foreman printer would not turn a hair. If a pestilence were to sweep through the editorial department one surviving sub-editor would send up the agency services and the paper would come out. But if the Father of the Chapel sent down a note to the editor informing him that the trade union rules had been violated by a hair's breath, there would be the silence of death in the composing-room, and, until an abject apology had

been received, no paper would see the light of day. They were the masters of the situation, all powerful, and they had the pride of free men, untouched by the restlessness, the feverishness, the intriguing, the flattery, the cringing cowardice of some of the men down-stairs, who, without any trade union to defend their rights, were at the mercy of despots, benevolent or otherwise, always afraid of losing their jobs, always haunted by the fear of going home to their wives and children with a month's notice in their pocket.

Frank was curiously interested in the private lives of these "comps," whose only luxury at night seemed to be the snuff which they took in large quantities, and the half-hour's "knockoff" at eight-o'clock when they went out to get a cheap meal and one pipe. They earned good wages, some of them—the linotype men as much as five pounds a week—but it did not seem more than sufficient to keep above the border line of poverty. House rent was dear, even in the Battersea Park Road; they subscribed to clubs and masonic lodges which would give something to the "missus" if they pegged out; they spent a good deal on food and tobacco, and nearly all of them put money on horses and "cup-ties" or adopted other means of gambling.

"What's the good of it?" he asked, and they answered that it kept them alive and gave them a bit of excitement. The matter seemed to them past argument. Betting seemed as necessary to many of these men as bread-and-butter. On the other hand, there were some who adopted higher and less expensive hobbies. One man was an ardent student of theology, and tackled Frank Luttrell one evening on the writings of Cardinal Newman and Matthew Arnold in a way that was damaging to Luttrell's self-respect. Several of them were eminent men on the clarinet, bass-viol, saxophone, and other instruments of

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which Frank was utterly and shamefully ignorant. Another, the pride of the composing-room, was the champion amateur pugilist of South London, and had knocked out Jim Crow the American negro, to say nothing of a news-editor who had once given him a "bit of sauce."

It was from these men that Frank had learnt some of the inner secrets of the *Rag*. They confided to him that as a philanthropic institution for converting "the benighted 'eathen" to the gospel of Nonconformist Liberalism, it was the most expensive thing of its kind. The "ads," as they called the advertisements, were not enough to pay the wages on the editorial floor, and most of them were paid for at starvation rates. The circulation was dropping off steadily, and at its best it had been very bad. They didn't think much of Bellamy as an editor. He was a smart little fellow with a genial way, but he hadn't got a brain big enough for his job, which would take the wisdom of an archangel so long as Liberals were too poor to buy a penny paper and while the Liberal government made every big business man quake in his shoes. They assured Frank that all great advertisers put their money into Conservative papers, which supported property and went into the hands of the rich. Hairdressers' assistants, Nonconformist clergymen, congregations of dissenting chapels, inspired vegetarians, and peace-at-any-price people, who made up the bulk of Liberal readers in London—according to composing-room opinions—were no good at all from a business point of view. "All the money is on the other side—when it's a question of ads," said Mr. Morewood. "Why, firms that are spending thousands a week will think three times before they give us a paltry quarter column. It's a dashed good thing for us that we 'ave a proprietor who is not running this show as a financial proposition and who can stand the racket till all's blue. 'E looks upon it as 'is little 'obby,

I understand, and he's got three and an 'alf million to play about with. That's more than enough for golf."

"Supposing he gets tired of this hobby," said Frank, "and takes to building free libraries for other people's newspapers?"

"Well, then, Gord 'elp us and our wives and kids," said Mr. Morewood, measuring off a column of type with a piece of string.

Frank's knowledge of the editorial floor was due to a more extensive sphere of work. The Chief had got rid of the young gentleman who had Belgium on the brain, and of several other gentlemen of academical distinction who had been earning good salaries in return for one leader-note a night. They had been appointed by Bellamy's predecessor in the editorial chair, who had organised the staff regardless of expense, with the proprietor's full consent. When Bellamy had first seen the salary list he nearly swooned, and had to send out immediately for a glass of "milk," which cost him sixpence. But there were wheels within wheels, and Bellamy had to move slowly in his work of retrenchment and reform. It was only during recent days, when the proprietor had been brooding over the figures of the last financial year, that Bellamy had been allowed to cut off the heads of a number of men whom he had long marked down as "weeds" in his private note-book. To do him justice he destroyed these members of his staff with the utmost tenderness, and as though he loved them. To the gentleman with the Belgian weakness he said that he had come reluctantly to the opinion that he was too good for his position, that his high talent deserved a wider scope, and that he, Bellamy, felt it his duty not to stand in his way of advancement.

"It's very good of you to put it like that," said the junior leader-writer, fingering his dismissal note. "It

is better than being kicked out, but of course it comes to the same thing, and won't comfort my wife who is expecting a new baby."

Bellamy wrung him by the hand heartily.

"My dear fellow, when you are editor of the *Spectator*, you will be grateful to me for having removed you from a place utterly unsuited to your abilities."

It was owing to these dismissals that Frank found himself with more work and higher wages. Bellamy took him out to supper one night. It was an hour—sometimes extending to nearly two hours—when the editor allowed himself a complete break from the cares of office. It was also the hour when he made and unmade favourites. Frank had often noticed men used to hang round the editor's door when eight o'clock approached, like courtiers in the ante-room of a king. Some of them who enjoyed the personal favours of the Chief used to be more forward in soliciting his company. Quin, for instance, used to poke his head into the room, and with his whimsical smile, say, "Can I order you a salmon steak this evening, my lord?" and then in a whisper he would say, "I have a remarkably good story to tell you this evening. No whiskers on it, honour bright. . . . Hush not a word." If Quin were doing a first night, Codrington perhaps would open the door of the editor's room in a noiseless way, close it behind him, and taking off his remarkable hat, stand silent and elegant before his Chief. Bellamy would look up, and start with mock alarm. "Have you come to borrow money, Codrington? If so, get out."

"No, sir, I only wondered whether I might join you at supper this evening?"

"No, you may not. Go and have supper with one of your concubines. I am having my simple meal with a man of strict virtue and high ideals. Needless to say,

he is a distinguished Liberal who does *not* order this paper from his newsagent. He reads it free of charge at the club and has a huge admiration for its noble purpose. Damn him!"

Frank was not one of the ante-chamber courtiers, but Silas Bellamy sent down word to him one evening that he would like his company for an hour. Such an invitation was equal to a Royal command, and Codrington, who overheard it raised his blonde eyebrows and congratulated him. "I shall be taking off my hat to you as chief leader-writer, Luttrell."

"It is more likely that I am going to get a month's notice," said Frank.

"Well, I admit that's just as probable," said Codrington pleasantly. "There's a feeling of unrest in the air. I never come to the office without being prepared for my death-warrant."

It was characteristic of Bellamy that for three-quarters of an hour in the Italian Restaurant round the corner he did not mention the special purpose of the interview. He ordered a nice little meal for Luttrell and shared a bottle of Burgundy with him, and talked pleasantly and quite amusingly of his experiences in many parts of the world. He was especially proud of his career as religious editor on the *Chicago Angel* when he smelt out heresy in many different congregations and worked up sensational copy, when the heretics obtained writs for libel or resisted the authority of their elders, bishops, or ecclesiastical bodies.

At the tooth-pick stage of the meal Bellamy said in a casual way—

"What would you think if I doubled your salary, Luttrell?"

"I should think you were joking," said Frank, after

a sufficient pause to study the idea in its different and alluring aspects.

Bellamy seemed pleased with the answer and laughed in his throat.

"Well, just as you like," he said. "You needn't accept my offer if you don't care for it. . . . The truth is you have been doing pretty good work, Luttrell, and I believe you could do better. Anyhow, I am going to make you do more. I am going to introduce you to our chief leader-writer—ever met him? He's worth knowing as a type of the high-souled, academical, unjournalistic gentleman—and you'll have to write a leader-note for him when you're not out late or away on one of Vicary's cod news stories. I am also going to introduce you to our literary editor—he's another pretty specimen: he would like to abolish news altogether and give nothing but literary articles by long-haired gents who have a stupendous reputation at Tooting Bec, Cheyne Row, Chelsea, and Slocumb-in-the-Mud. You'll have to fill up your time by doing reviews for him. That's why I am going to raise your salary."

Luttrell began to thank him with an emotion that gripped his throat, but Bellamy cut him short.

"Oh, it's nothing but sweating. I wouldn't put it to you myself, but the proprietor is all for cutting down expenses, and as I'm handling his money I have to work out his ideas—when he has any—don't you know. Have you ever struck the proprietor? He ought to be put into a poem."

He was thoughtful for a moment, with a whimsical smile, as he pulled his little chestnut moustache. Then he returned to the subject of Luttrell's salary.

"Look here, don't you go buying motor-cars or taking Gaiety girls out to tea. There's no knowing if I shan't have to give you the sack in another week or two."

He laughed and then shook hands with Frank and said, "I like your stuff, Luttrell. You're a scholar and a gentleman, don't you know, and all that."

Frank did not know how far he was to take the editor seriously. He even doubted whether the doubling of his salary was anything more than a jest. Men are not in the habit of expecting miracles nowadays, and Frank, who had written himself down as an arrant failure, would really have taken his dismissal without a thought of being unjustly treated. For a little while after he had left Bellamy he was tempted to do wild things, to burst into the reporters' room with the great news, to go over to the club and stand endless whisky-and-sodas to men who could take them endlessly, to go and shed tears of joy on Mother Hubbard's shoulder, or to go and implore Katherine to kiss him once, whatever Codrington might say. But he did none of these things and gradually cooled down to a normal temperature, reflecting that he would look a pretty fool if Bellamy had only been indulging in *badinage*. He decided to say nothing about the rise, imaginary or real, to any of his colleagues, until it was put to the test on the following Friday at the cashier's desk.

That Bellamy had been serious up to a point was proved when he duly introduced Luttrell to the chief leader-writer and the literary editor, leaving him in their hands after a few jesting words.

Luttrell had often seen the tall man with the iron-grey hair and the long, ascetic face who, day by day, or rather night by night, gave expression to the clear and rather cold voice of intellectual Liberalism. He had seen him coming out of the editor's room, slightly flushed, and smiling in a half-amused, half-contemptuous way. He had seen him sitting in his own room with Blue Books in front of him, the table and floor littered with morning

and evening papers, his iron-grey hair disordered, and his hatchet-like face bending over the desk as he wrote page after page of manuscript in a fine, crabbed, scholarly hand which was the horror of the linotype men upstairs. He had read morning after morning those clear, polished, faultless phrases in which he reproved European monarchs for indiscretions, ridiculed Conservative orators in an ironical vein which was never violent and seldom bitter, gave additional weight to the somewhat ponderous arguments of Liberal politicians, upheld the old Gladstonian ideals without the Gladstonian fire and emotion, and went back repeatedly to first principles of political, social and ethical philosophy in dealing with the facts and problems and tendencies of modern life.

Frank found Henry Bathhurst to be a man of highly-strung nervous temperament, with a strain of intellectual arrogance and impatience which had a rather paralysing effect on those with whom he came in touch. The truth was, as Frank discovered upon closer acquaintance, that the man was hopelessly ill at ease in the turmoil of a newspaper office. He had been a don at Cambridge, where his text-books on political economy had been received as the new gospel. Among his fellow-professors he had been known as a man of singularly high and noble character, unsullied by any mean qualities, and illuminated by a keen and kindly wit. In that atmosphere of scholarship, of moral and mental exclusiveness into which the vulgarities and squalor of life did not enter, Henry Bathhurst breathed naturally. But when he exchanged the society of professors for that of pressmen in obedience to an impulse which bade him put his political economy to the test of practical problems, he found himself in a new world of beings with whom he had but little sympathy and who bewildered him continually. Silas Bellamy, his editor, amused him sometimes, irritated him

constantly, and was always a mystery to him. He could not understand his flippancy, his apparent indifference to all the great ideals of Liberalism, his evident light-heartedness in the face of Liberal defeats. When Henry Bathhurst went into his room to discuss some momentous question of policy, Bellamy would polish his nails, play with a bayonet on his desk, and after listening for five minutes with a queer little smile under his moustache would look up and say, "I have no doubt you're right, Bathhurst, I cannot imagine you ever being wrong. But, of course, politics never gave us any circulation and never will. It's news that people want, and a few light articles to keep them cheerful."

The only time when the editor exercised his prerogative of criticism and veto was when Henry Bathhurst hit any party too hard or used his gift of irony as a rapier. Then Bellamy would in his whimsical way protest against this ill-usage of harmless people who no doubt had their use in the world, and bought the necessities and luxuries of life which created advertisements for the maintenance of newspapers. He admitted that in all probability advertisements were an eye-sore to the chaste eyes of a Cambridge professor, but unless they were admitted to the paper Bathhurst would have no means of raising the ideals of the people, for the simple reason that the paper would cease to exist.

"Do you mean to say, then," said Henry Bathhurst, "that I have got to be dishonest in order that some low creature with Tory prejudices may be induced to pay for half-a-column of Bilious Beans in black type?"

"Dishonesty," said Bellamy, stroking his fair moustache, "is unknown in a newspaper office. Diplomacy is a better word and hurts nobody's feelings."

After such conversations as this Henry Bathhurst would go back to his room and fling himself down in his

chair with a burst of laughter in which there was no mirth.

"The whole thing is sordid and squalid," he said one night to Luttrell who had come to get instructions for a "leader-note." "To a man of honour it is an intolerable situation."

Once he poured forth the vials of his wrath upon all pressmen. They were ignorant, vulgar, coarse and stupid. They were false to every ethical ideal. They were board-school boys invested with terrible power. He had come to the conviction that a journalist could not be a gentleman. They might have been gentlemen once, and they might retain certain superficial traces of gentility, but at the heart of them they were mostly rotten.

"When I see these sinister people walking about the office," he said, "these so-called business men who control the machine, these men with Yankee ideals, I despair of the future of the country."

Luttrell, who knew more about the personalities in the office and of journalists in other offices—for Henry Bathurst held himself aloof and remained in the seclusion of his own room—did not entirely agree with this sweeping condemnation. He, more than Bathurst, had been broken on the wheel of the machine: more sensitive even than the man of academical training, he had suffered the tortures of a shy spirit in the rough crowd. Henry Bathurst after all had never gone out into the streets to seek interviews with snobs, to flatter flunkeys, to be insulted by all sorts and conditions of people who, like Bathurst, the Cambridge professor, did not think that a journalist could be a gentleman. He was a descriptive reporter at the call of a news-editor, and he saw the worst side of Fleet Street. But in fairness to Frank Luttrell's breadth of mind it must be said that he saw more to admire than to blame. He had marvelled often at the gaiety with

which those men faced their daily life and at the courage with which they took the ups and downs of a switchback career. He knew that Bathhurst himself was regarded with somewhat contemptuous amusement by his colleagues on lower planes of the journalistic ladder. When they passed judgment on him briefly as an "academical gent" they expressed a truth which Frank, who was also a 'Varsity man, had not been slow in admitting. It was true that they could not all read read *Æschylus* in the original or quote the satires of Juvenal, but they saw day by day greater tragedies than those conceived by Greek poets, and went behind the scenes of that *comédie humaine*, in which Juvenal had learnt his knowledge of manners and men.

The literary editor to whom Luttrell went, with his usual nervousness and diffidence, was a different type of man from Henry Bathhurst. When Luttrell first tapped at his door and went in, he saw a young, anæmic-looking man with fair wavy hair going a little grey and a pale, haggard, clean-shaven face, seated, with his elbows on the desk, a novel opened before him and six other novels in a pile at his elbow. He was smoking a cigarette, and the third finger of his left hand was deeply stained with nicotine. As Luttrell entered he groaned slightly, and pushed back a lock of his fair hair from his forehead. Then he swung round in his chair, and said in a nervous way, "You're Luttrell, aren't you? The Chief spoke to me about you. He says you are going to do a review now and again."

"If I may," said Luttrell. "I have had very little experience except at Oxford, where I used to do books for the mag."

Percival Phillimore pointed to the novels.

"If you could do some of them in your spare time I should be grateful. But I warn you it is the most soul-

destroying work in the world. I have reviewed a hundred and fifty novels this year, and my brain has gone to pulp. Nine-tenths of them are utterly bad, the others are just endurable. But one loses all sense of proportion. When one reads a novel that does not violate every rule of grammar and contains just a few traces of good sense and good feeling, one is apt to hail it as a work of genius. The worst of it is we can't afford to tell the truth about the bad ones. The only justification of a literary page in a newspaper is the publishers' advertisements, so that we can't be too severe. Besides, the public would not read columns of adverse criticism. A review must always err on the side of kindness, and find excuse for the worst of literary charlatans."

Luttrell was drawn towards this man who called himself literary editor, and wrote most of the reviews of his own page. Although he looked under thirty he had been on every rung of the journalistic ladder, and on most of the London papers. It appeared that he was married and had a beautiful wife in the suburbs, and three young children to whom he told fairy-tales in bed every morning. He had written several big books on history, and innumerable essays and articles; and a life of incessant literary labour, from early morning until late at night, had made him a man of delicate health and overwrought nerves. He had had repeated struggles with poverty, and this had made him anxious and melancholy, but underneath that melancholy there was a gleam of spiritual sunshine, and he had tenderness of character which gave him an almost feminine sensibility.

Though Frank Luttrell did not know it, Percival Phillimore was curiously like himself in many ways. It was as though Luttrell were face to face with his own personality after Fleet Street had done its worst with him, and when disappointment, failure, toil, long hours, and mental

strain and stress had left him physically enfeebled and weary in spirit. If ever such a thought had sprung into Luttrell's mind it would have come to him as a shock, for although he spent many pleasant minutes in Phillimore's room, talking "literature," telling his adventures, and finding some restfulness in the presence of this tired, shy, and sympathetic man, he always pitied him as he pitied any weak and forlorn creature who had been wrecked on the shore of life.

But Luttrell at this time, and for the first time during his career in Fleet Street, was hopeful and elated. When the first Friday came round after his supper with Bellamy he received a cheque for nine guineas. So it was true! He was a man of means—of almost inconceivable wealth! On four pounds ten a week he had paid his way, by careful management, leaving himself a margin for small luxuries. On nine guineas he would not know what to do with his money. That was what he thought while standing at the cashier's desk fingering the bit of pink paper which was a document standing for more than gold—a diploma of merit, an acknowledgment of hard service on behalf of the *Rag*, a reward for insults and absurdities, and loss of self-respect, and mental irritation, and hours of futile work, and articles never published, and articles chopped down, and nights of dreadful doubt, and mornings of blank pessimism, and days of infinite fatigue.

CHAPTER XIV

It happened that a Bourbon princess was to be married to a Bourbon prince, and—by a chain of facts that began in the year 1789 when a pale young man with long hair and black eyes jumped on to a table outside the Palais Royal in Paris and shouted “Aux armes!” to a mob of butchers, clerks, lawyers, and market-women—it appeared that the marriage was to take place in the heart of Worcestershire. It seems curious that the downfall of the Bastille, followed by the march on Versailles, the sack of the Tuileries, the escape to Varennes and the execution of Louis Capet, should have any influence upon the life of a young journalist named Francis Luttrell, a century and a half later, but it seems curious only because men do not understand how their lives have already been in some measure fashioned for them in the womb of Time, and how many of their actions and adventures have been made possible by the deeds of men and women whose bones have long been mouldering in the grave or scattered among the motes which dance in the sunbeam. If Louis XVI. had not been fat and somnolent after dinner, and ruled by a woman with a stronger will; even if Jean Jacques Rousseau had not written a book which was read by young blacksmiths by the light of their forge, and by poor Parisian clerks in their fireless lodgings, or by men and women with wit beneath their powdered wigs; or if Madame de Warens had not been the “cher maman” of the loutish young man in whose brain was conceived the *contrat social*, or if—a thousand things going back down the dim vistas of history haunted by millions of unknown

ghosts—the joy-bells would not have rung for a Bourbon princess at her marriage in a Worcestershire farm-house, and Francis Luttrell would not have been what now he is.

There was another chain of events much too tedious to follow out, but quite independently, leading to the strange connection between the journalist and the French Revolution. For if Queen Elizabeth had not been fond of pinching the ears—and sometimes slapping the faces—of handsome young men who pretended to be in love with her, it is quite certain that Christopher Codrington would not have been sent off to describe a pastoral play at Sherborne which was given by the great Queen to young Walter Raleigh. And if Codrington had not gone to Sherborne he would certainly have gone to the Bourbon wedding in Worcestershire, and Francis Luttrell would probably, on that day, have eaten a mutton chop in a Fleet Street restaurant, without having his fate linked up with the *ancien régime* of France, so strangely do things come about.

Vicary, the news-editor, was the instrument of Fate. He called Luttrell into his room one afternoon and told him that he was to get away next morning to a Worcestershire town where once a great battle was fought. Vicary did not mention the battle, but Frank, who used to read history, remembered it. "We haven't a ticket," said Vicary, "and what you have got to do when you are on the ground is to lay your hands on two."

"Why two?" asked Luttrell.

"Because I tell you so," said Vicary amiably, "and, if you want to know more on the subject, because Miss Katherine Halstead is going with you to describe the frocks. Any objection?"

Frank controlled his emotion admirably, and said, "None whatever," just as he might have done if a man in the corner seat of a railway carriage had asked whether

he had any objection to the window being shut. But Vicary's words had opened the window of his imagination, and he saw a delightful vision of a gay adventure with Katherine as his comrade.

Vicary gave one of his prodigious winks. He winked with one whole side of his face.

"I thought you wouldn't mind. Katherine is a charming girl; I hope you will behave discreetly and look after her carefully."

"Miss Halstead is quite able to look after herself," said Mr. Frank Luttrell, with a rather steely look in his grey-blue eyes.

Vicary was amused, and when he was amused he had a habit of twisting his body, and laughing behind a big fist.

"Oh, oh! There's a nasty east wind in here!"

Then he became business-like and told Luttrell in his abrupt way that it was a good story, and he ought to be jolly glad to get on to it—and he must write a preparatory article describing who the Bourbons were when they were at home, and who was going to be married to whom, and above all things he was to get two tickets for the wedding on the following day, and put his stuff on to the wires before they were bunged up with messages to all the papers in Europe and the village of London.

Frank met Katherine in the passage. He had been to the flat again for three evenings, and she had forgotten the mysterious girl of Battersea Park, or, if she remembered, she had forgiven him, and asked no more questions.

She had already heard the news, and greeted him in the passage with an excited pleasure which she did not attempt to conceal.

"How splendid! There will be some wonderful frocks, and they say the princess's wedding gown is beyond the dreams of women."

"I suppose as far as I am concerned it will mean top hat and frock coat?" said Frank, talking in the leisurely way which all Englishmen affect when they want to hide their feelings.

"*And* lavender gloves, if you please, and a silver-knobbed stick. You must look your very bestest best. We are going to rub shoulders with the crowned heads of Europe, and all sorts of queer, disreputable people in their Sunday clothes."

Frank promised humbly to try and look the part of a potentate, but he was quite sure that his disguise would be imperfect.

Katherine tipped up her face a little and studied him with critical eyes as he leant against the passage wall.

"I am quite sure you will be mistaken for a prince."

"It is a doubtful compliment," said Frank, who had seen some princes since he had been a journalist.

"Prince Charming," said Katherine. "One of the fairy-book kind, and I will be your princess, that is if your Royal Highness will stoop to so poor a beggar-maid."

There was a roguish look on her face, yet something more or less than roguishness in the smile with which she said these words. It was as though she had discovered while the words were on her lips, that the man before her had really that beauty which belongs to the princes of Elf-land, being tall, and strong, and meek before women.

"It is you who stoop," said Frank, after a pause. "But if you will let me be your knight, princess, I will defend you from all fierce dragons and naughty fiends who may stand in our path."

"It will be a gay adventure," said Katherine, drooping her eyes before his gaze. And then she gave her silver laugh and went away from him.

It seemed to Frank that he was unworthy of the great

favour promised to him. He was even a little afraid, knowing that in real life, as in fairy-land, there are fierce dragons and naughty fiends which lie in wait for the man who does not keep a watch over his own heart. Yet his fear was only for a moment, and when he went out to buy the lavender gloves and the silver-knobbed stick, and a pair of patent boots, and a new silk hat—the adventure was not to be without expense—he was as merry as if he were preparing for his own marriage; even more merry, for there was all the amusement of make-believe without the responsibility of actual fact.

In the evening he had to attend a dinner at the Mansion House, where his thoughts wandered so much that he had to beg the friendship of a fellow-pressman to give him the drift of an important political speech by the Prime Minister, of whose priceless words of wisdom on the fascinating subject of Free Trade he had not heard a single syllable. Upon returning to the office he found a note on his desk. It was from Katherine, and said, "I shall meet you at Paddington to-morrow well before eleven. I am having a dress rehearsal to-night with Mother Hubbard."

When Frank put all his things on in the morning—a tail coat, well-creased trousers (he had put them under his mattress, and slept on them), patent leather boots, new silk hat, and lavender gloves—he felt just as big a fool as a man who is really going to get married at Hanover Square, or St. Margaret's, Westminster. He had a desperate temptation to throw the hat out of his window into Holborn, to pitch his black coat into the coal-scuttle, and to slip into a Norfolk jacket and his old sense of freedom. It seemed absurd to be going into the country on a day of sunshine dressed like an undertaker. He said many violent things to himself about the idiocy of human nature, and then with a last glance at himself in a mirror,

four inches by three (which to tell the truth slightly restored his cheerfulness, for it was a very good hat, and not a bad-looking face), strolled out of Staple Inn, and hailed the nearest hansom.

It was two minutes to eleven before Katherine appeared, and two minutes before the train started. Frank had waited for three-quarters of an hour, and now, with one foot on the step of an empty first-class carriage, was feeling that the gods had mocked at him. Something, he felt sure, must have prevented Katherine from coming with him. Perhaps Vicary had sent her a wire cancelling the engagement and sending her off to some fancy bazaar, or to a breakfast to suffragettes released from Holloway. Then he saw her coming up the platform followed by a porter with her bag, as though the train would wait for her good pleasure, however late she might be. She wore a white silk dress and a white hat with pink roses, and long white gloves, and she carried a flowered-silk parasol with a long crooked handle, and she looked as fresh and simple and sweet as a shepherdess in Dresden china, or a lady of the old French court in one of Watteau's pictures. She caught sight of Frank from the far end of the platform and came towards him, smiling. Even from the end of the platform Frank could see that she was smiling.

She dropped him a half-curtsey on the platform, regardless of the gruff porter, who shouted, "Are you going, miss?" and of the guard who was waiting to wave his flag. Frank took off his hat and bent over her white-gloved hand as she stretched it out to him.

"Princess," he said, "I was very much afraid."

"Of what?"

"I thought you were going to miss the train."

"Pooh!" said Katherine, "I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

She got into the carriage, and Frank stepped in after her as the train moved off.

"First class!" said Katherine. "Vicary only allows second class on a long journey."

"Oh, I will pay the difference. This is my day out." He stood watching her as she peeped into a mirror beneath the rack and altered the position of her hat by a hair's breadth. Then she caught his eyes in the glass and smiled at them. "How's this for style?" she asked, turning round and taking a corner seat.

Frank said that as far as he could judge, and he had had very little experience, it was quite perfect. She returned the compliment by saying that he had put on his clothes very nicely, and that he looked exactly like the hero of a *Family Herald* Supplement. That, said Frank, was a pretty brutal thing to say to a man who had violated every principle of his life in dressing himself up like a tailor's dummy, and he pitched his hat on to the rack with such carelessness of its beautiful architecture that Katherine was shocked and angry at his behaviour. So they quarrelled for five minutes in the most delightful way, and then felt quite at ease with each other, and prepared to settle down to a railway conversation.

Of course, there is nothing in the world so pleasant as a railway conversation between a man and woman really interested in each other. Only on a desert island could they be so lonely as in a railway carriage reserved for themselves on an express train which goes rushing into the heart of the country at sixty miles an hour. In no other place in the world do a man's words come so swiftly, so easily, so light-heartedly, when there is a charming girl in the corner seat ready to be amused, and quick to answer his spoken thoughts, and pleased to reward his little jests with laughter that is not loud or

strained, but a silvery, rippling mirthfulness that comes from a gay spirit.

Frank and Katherine found a thousand things to laugh about. It was amusing, for instance, to make up stories about the lives of the people who belonged to the houses and cottages and fields which sped swiftly past them. They were short stories in chapters of one sentence, and Katherine was the best at the game.

"In that old thatched cottage there lives a poor old widow who was once the beauty of the village sixty years ago. Every Sunday she goes to that little churchyard—how the sunshine gleams on the white tombstones!—and dreams a dream about the boy who loved her. He used to come vaulting across that stile, and—go on, Frank."

"And she used to wait for him at the top of that little lane where the sign-post stands. The sun was always in her eyes, which were as blue as the sky above those white cottages on the hill. They would go hand-in-hand up that winding path towards the church there—you can just see it through the trees, Katherine, and——"

"They used to think of the time when they would go into that very building there, and after a little while come out as man and wife, and live in a farm-house surrounded by big barns, like that one we just passed, and keep cows, like those wading in that pond. But one day the young man did not come vaulting across the stile——"

"He inherited a large fortune and went to live in that glorious old manor—Elizabethan by the look of it, where he smoked big cigars and drank more brandy than was good for him——"

"And every day for sixty years that woman has gone to the top of the lane to wait for him."

"And there is the very old woman," said Frank, "shading her eyes against the sun outside her cottage gate. She

has not got a tooth in her head, and she is as ugly as an old witch."

"But she believes she is still young and beautiful, and every day she thinks her young man will come vaulting across the stile again."

That was one of the best stories they made up to the scenes outside the carriage window, and Katherine did not laugh this time and say, "What nonsense you do talk, Frank!" when it was finished. She said it was an allegory of most women's lives, and she thought their imaginations were getting a little morbid.

Her gaiety was restored when at Rugby a boy came to the carriage door and handed in two luncheon baskets.

"That is a thoughtful boy," said Katherine. "Where did he get the idea from?"

Frank had sent a telegram in advance from Paddington, but he made believe that it was a little attention always shown towards the Royal travellers by the directors of the line who were aware that a prince and princess were travelling *incognito*. Of course Katherine did not believe him, but she pretended to, which was better still, and they had a merry meal with the luncheon baskets on their knees. Frank drank her health without winking in a tumbler of thin red wine which tasted like vinegar, and said with his best French accent, "A votre santé, princesse." She touched her glass with her lips and clinked it against his, and replied, "A vous, mon prince!"

When they arrived at the end of the line Frank got out of the carriage and touched the tips of Katherine's fingers, as she jumped lightly on to the platform.

"You see," said Frank, "they have put down the red carpet for us, and the station is charmingly decorated in our honour."

Above their heads was a canopy of sky-blue silk em-

broidered with the fleur-de-lis of France, and the walls of the rural station were draped with flags of many rich colours, but not the red, white and blue of England, or the blue, red and white of Republican France. A number of foreign gentlemen descended from the train, tall Frenchmen with brown spade beards (like Elizabethan gentlemen), who were received with kisses on both cheeks, or with much raising of hats and bending of backs by other foreigners of a similar type. Only one language was spoken on the platform, except by Frank and Katherine, and it was the vivacious, sparkling nimble tongue of France. It was queer to hear it in the heart of Worcestershire.

Katherine had found a friend. It was none other than Edmund Grattan, who was standing among a group of distinguished-looking Frenchmen who were laughing heartily at a story he was telling in their own language, spoken with perfect fluency and with an exquisite accent.

Katherine touched him on the arm, and he turned round quickly, lifting his hat and bowing low. It was already dusk, for Frank and Katherine had travelled a long way since eleven o'clock, and for the twinkling of an eye the Irishman did not recognise the elegant girl in the white silk frock, and the white hat with pink bows. "A votre service, madame." In a flash he saw Katherine's smiling face.

"What, Kitty, you here! That is good. You should have let me know, and we could have come down together." Then he saw Luttrell, and said, "But no, you were in good hands, and I should have spoilt a delightful *tête-à-tête*." He gripped Frank's hand. "You are just in time. Young Alfonso will be here in three minutes by special train."

A tall man with a heavy tread approached Frank and

said politely but firmly, "You must move off the platform, if you please."

"That is all right," said Grattan. "This lady and gentleman are London journalists and my friends."

"Oh. If they are friends of yours, Mr. Grattan——"

The man raised his hat and strolled away.

"You seem a very important person," said Katherine. "Who is that potentate?"

"A Scotland Yard man. I met him in Madrid on the marriage day, when the bomb went off under the horses' feet. He was not quite sharp enough that time, but of course the Spanish detectives were in charge, and a bright lot they are, to be sure."

A few moments after the train in which Frank and Katherine had travelled went off on to a siding, there was sound of a motor-car fussing and bubbling in the station-yard outside, a rattle of steel, and the hoarse voice of a man shouting, "Present arrrrms!"

"Le roi en exil," said Grattan.

The crowd of French gentlemen round the booking-office ranged themselves in two ranks and bowed very low as two tall men came on to the platform. One was a middle-aged man with a blonde beard, and bluish eyes, and a soft, womanish face which yet had an extraordinary likeness, as it seemed to Frank, to old prints of Henry IV.

"Paris vaut bien une messe."

Frank remembered the old epigram, and the figure of that dare-devil hero-villain who had fought and intrigued his way to the French throne far back in history. How blood will out! After five centuries here was the same nose, the same prominent eyes of the victor of Ivry belonging to a gentleman in a frock coat and a silk hat, whose name was Louis Philippe Bourbon Orléans, and who—but for the republican instincts of a

great people—would be, by right divine, or otherwise, King of France.

By his side was a young, clean-shaven man with a nose of the same shape—the Bourbon nose which not even the guillotine could ever cut off, however many heads were sliced into the bloody baskets on the Place de la Revolution.

“The Duc de Montpensier,” said Grattan. “Quite a bright young fellow.”

A few moments later a white train glided alongside the platform, and out of one of the carriages came springing with a light, quick step, a tall boy, with a pale, melancholy face and dark, haunting eyes, and a mouth twisted into a strange, sad smile. Every hat on the platform was swept low, every head but one bowed down, and for a moment there was silence. Then while the tall boy went quickly towards the middle-aged gentleman with the blonde beard, who took both his hands and kissed him twice, a voice shouted out, “Vive le roi! Vive le roi d’Espagne!”

A little group of dark, handsome, sallow-faced young men had dismounted from the train and stood with bared heads in a half circle round the two central figures of that tableau, under the silk canopy embroidered with fleur-de-lis, with a background of orange and crimson facings.

“Come along,” said Grattan. “He is going to inspect the guard of honour.” He dodged through two lines of tip-toed foreigners, and Katherine, seizing Frank’s hand, followed swiftly through a white wicket gate to the yard outside the station. Here there was a hollow square framed on one side by a battalion of Worcestershire volunteers in khaki, on the other three sides by a dense mass of Worcestershire gentry and yokels wedged in between great motor-cars with their burnished lamps and metal

gleaming like gold in the glinting rays of the afternoon sun.

The tall boy with the grave face and the burning eyes and the sad, twisted smile came out of the station followed by his kinsman of the House of Bourbon. At a quick, sprightly step with his head high and turned stiffly to the right, the younger man walked with a six-foot-three officer carrying a drawn sword, along the line of Worcestershire men who held their rifles in front of their noses. The boy in the silk hat and frock coat turned and held out his hand and said, "Thank you" to the young officer, who for a moment stared at the hand of a king, and then tucking his sword under his left arm, grasped it in a good hard English grip.

"I like him!" said Katherine, and Frank said "Who?"

"The sad boy-king; what a wistful smile that is!"

The king without a throne led the sovereign of the proudest, poorest nation of Europe to his automobile, which in a moment gave a long-drawn sigh and then a few panting breaths, and then with a fierce snort bounded out of the station-yard like one of Frank's imaginary dragons, while the Worcestershire yokels shouted "Hooray!"

A procession of motor-cars and carriages streamed out of the station-yard and then down the High Street of an old town of square-built Georgian houses, with here and there an old gabled roof and timbered front of a house that had been built when Elizabeth was Queen.

Grattan took Katherine's hand and put her arm through his, and told Frank to have the baggage sent up to the Royal Arms, the best old hostelry in the town. For the first time since his friendship with Grattan, Frank wished this Irishman further away. Good fellow as he was, he was taking the lead in an adventure which Frank regarded as his own with Katherine as his comrade-in-

arms. Katherine glanced at his face, and perhaps in a woman's intuitive way she read the thought that had made him rather silent during the last few minutes. She told Grattan that they were going to put the baggage on his shoulders, or in his cab if he had one, and that as he was an old and tried friend, she was going to entrust him with the responsible duty of fixing up rooms for them at the Royal Arms. Meanwhile she and Mr. Luttrell had a little business on hand for their paper of an entirely private and confidential character. Grattan smiled at her mysterious words, and protested that as an old journalist he did not wish to poke his nose into other people's "scoops." He would obey her commands to the letter. But, as a friend and rival, he felt bound to say that if she had any intention of calling at the house of the king in exile she might save herself the journey. Strict orders had been given to turn back all members of the press and any one not a guest, or a servant of a guest, at the old farm-house where princes and princesses of the Royal Houses of Europe were treading on each other's heels. These people were constitutionally nervous of spies and anarchists, and Scotland Yard had been asked to put a detective behind every bush of the three-mile avenue.

"Three miles?" said Katherine. "Then we must take a carriage."

Grattan laughed. "You have let the cat out of the bag! —My dear children, you had much better come and have tea with me. It is easier for a camel to get through the turnstiles of the Zoo than for a stranger to pass three miles of policemen with strict orders to bar all persons who cannot produce a special permit."

"Pooh!" said Katherine. "I am not in the habit of being turned back by policemen."

Grattan did not argue the point, but, seizing the baggage, bundled it into a hackney carriage.

"Au revoir," he said. "For what hour shall I order your steaks and chip potatoes?"

"Expect us when you see us," said Katherine. "Mr. Luttrell, kindly order a private brougham with a coachman who can hold his tongue."

Frank was restored to his former gaiety. Katherine's air of command was magnificent. She ordered a private brougham and a discreet coachman with as much assurance as Cinderella's fairy godmother when she requested a pumpkin and four mice to change into a carriage and milk-white steeds. She gave her orders to Grattan as if he were her footman, and the Irishman obeyed just as promptly. Frank himself made a dash for a row of hackney carriages drawn up outside the station-yard and selected one in charge of a driver who wore a chimney-pot hat and an old blue coat with breast buttons. By his inarticulate grunt which signified that he was disengaged Frank was confident that he could "hold his tongue." Providence was on the side of youth and romance.

"Admirable!" said Katherine, when Frank opened the carriage door and handed her in.

"Tell him to drive to the house, and to answer no questions on the road."

They took precedence of Grattan as they drove out, and Katherine smiled graciously at the Irishman who sat wedged in between two portmanteaus—the baggage of these two adventurers which they had calmly handed over to him. He kissed his hand and seemed to regard them with amusement, as two wilful children who were out for trouble.

Frank was nervous. His pulses were doing double time. He had an uneasy feeling that "something might

happen." Without credentials it might be dangerous to drive through the lines of the army of police guarding a houseful of foreign royalties. He glanced at Katherine. She was sitting straight up. Excitement, or the drive through the cool evening breeze, had deepened the colour on her cheeks, and had made her eyes very luminous and sparkling.

"How's this for fun?" she said.

Frank answered that he would be glad to drive like this for ever down endless roads.

"Oh, that would be monotonous! Change is the magic thing. This is like Paradise, because we have come from Fleet Street. After a week here I should long for the smell of the motor-buses."

"No! no!" said Frank. "Let us forget Fleet Street and its stench. This smell is better than a whiff of the Press Restaurant. It is the scent of wet grass, and of flowers which say their prayers at this time offering up incense in that great cathedral." He pointed to a wood of giant beeches on the right of them as they drove along the white winding road.

"Listen!" said Katherine. "That is the cathedral choir. A thousand little boy birds are singing an anthem of praise for one more good day of life."

"To-day," said Frank, "they are singing to you. Do you notice how the sound gets louder as we pass? It is a song of greeting to Princess Snow-White."

Katherine was looking at the river which went winding down below in the green meadows flashing back the afternoon sun.

"It is like a snake with golden scales."

"This is Paradise, and that is the wicked old serpent, and we——" He stopped, and then laughed with a sudden embarrassment.

"Are like Adam and Eve," said Katherine, finishing

his sentence. She glanced at him under her long brown lashes and then looked far away to the line of purple hills beyond the river, and said in a thoughtful way, "It would be rather jolly to be Adam and Eve—to be quite alone in the big beautiful world, Frank . . . for a little while." She gave a deep quivering sigh which ended in a note of laughter. "I should never have to write fashion articles or describe society weddings!"

Frank drew a deep breath of the air which was fragrant with the scent of the grass and woods. Perhaps there was something rather intoxicating in that aroma of an evening in the springtime in Worcestershire. It gave him a kind of nostalgia, and when he answered Katherine's words his voice thrilled.

"Could we not make a little paradise like that?"

Katherine slipped her hand away and whispered, "Hush! Here comes the first challenge. Leave it to me."

A man came from behind a tree and went to the horse's head, raising his hand. The driver pulled up, and the man spoke to him in a low voice and seemed to get no answer but a grunt. Then the man came to the carriage door, and said, "Show your permit, if you please."

"Qu'est-ce-qu'il dit?" said Katherine to Frank. She leant over the carriage and smiled at the man and spoke most fluently in French, not a word of which did he seem to understand.

"Are you one of the dook's guests?" said the man, breaking in upon the rippling stream of words.

"Comme ils sont stupides, ces gens de police!" said Katherine. "Il eut voir, n'est ce-pas, que je suis Princesse de pur sang, sans tache et sans reproche. Malheureusement, je n'ai pas ma petite couronne à la poche."

The man caught the word "Princesse" and repeated it in Cockney English. "Well, of course, if you're a prin-

cess, it's all right, I suppose. Still I shall get into trouble if you ain't what you ought to be, you know." He muttered to himself something about "infernal lingo" and then stood back from the horse's head. "Get on with you," he said to the driver.

"One up to us," said Katherine when they had got beyond ear-shot. "It's a good thing these wretched policemen can't understand school-girl French."

Frank said "Bravo" with enthusiasm. "That was a brilliant idea." But he cursed the man in his heart for spoiling his dream of paradise. It was difficult to return to that subject. There are some conversations which can never be continued when once the thread is broken. Frank knew that the end of the thread in his web of fancy had slipped out of his hands, snapped by the heavy tread of a plain-clothes policeman.

Along the three-mile avenue they were challenged five times, and each time Katherine played her trick with success. Scotland Yard was at fault in sending down men who had not mastered conversational French. No doubt they would not have been so easily persuaded by a lady less elegant and charming than Katherine Halstead. But she spoke to them with such an air of dignity, softened by a gracious persuasiveness that their doubts were dispelled. Frank, too, sitting back, silent and grave, with his clear-cut face, looking very aristocratic under a new silk hat, was not the type of man to make a policeman suspect dynamite cartridges.

Without further trouble the two adventurers drove straight through a pair of high wrought-iron gates above which was the Royal Crown of France, and into the quadrangle of a low-built, straggling old English farmhouse, to which had been added new wings, and extensive outbuildings and stables. A number of motor-cars were drawn up on one side, and across the courtyard there

passed and repassed chauffeurs in uniform, French workmen in white blouses and blue overalls, servants in light blue coats and knee-breeches, powdered wigs, and white silk stockings, officials of a higher rank, in black silk coats, breeches, and stockings, and some of the foreign brown-bearded men, dressed in frock suits and tall hats, whom Frank and Katherine had first seen on the station platform. On one side of the courtyard was a beautiful chapel which seemed to have stood through centuries of English weather, and it was joined to the house by an open colonnade of Gothic pillars and arches. Its secret was only revealed by the French workmen in white blouses, who were hammering at its walls and putting on last touches of paint. This chapel which looked so ancient and weather-worn was made of nothing but pasteboard and canvas!

Frank gave his hand to Katherine at the carriage door, and immediately the door of the house opened revealing two lines of footmen in the livery of the old Court of France.

"Isn't this rather risky?" whispered Frank, and Katherine answered, "Not a little bit."

They went up the steps into a square hall panelled in dark oak, with a golden fleur-de-lis on each panel, and between the two lines of powdered footmen in scarlet and gold, whose white wigs bent low before them. Katherine held her head high, and swept over the polished floor in her white silk dress, as though she were indeed a princess coming home to her father's house. Frank had a curious feeling that he was acting a part in a pantomime. He would not have been surprised if the big doors at the end of the hall had opened suddenly and revealed a crowd of dancing maidens, or if a saucy old mother-in-law had come tumbling down the stairs head over heels.

At the end of the line of footmen was a tall officer

in white and gold with a long staff. He bowed low and said to Frank, in French—

"Whom may I have the honour to announce?"

Frank answered in English and gave his own name and Katherine's. The man seemed a little surprised, but was quite polite.

"You wish to see M. le Duc d'Orléans?"

Frank nodded, as if that should be taken for granted.

"You have an appointment with M. le Duc d'Orléans, no doubt?"

Katherine interposed. "You will have the goodness to take in our cards, will you not?"

The man bowed, called up a footman, and gave him an order.

"Vos cartes, s'il vous plait, Monsieur et Madame," said the man. He held out a golden salver engraved with the Arms of Royal France. Then he led Frank and Katherine down a long passage, where servants were scurrying to and fro, and ushered them into a small room furnished in the style of Louis Quinze. Bowing gravely he said that Monsieur and Madame would doubtless have a little patience until M. le Duc d'Orléans to whom he would take their cards should be able to see them. Naturally, M. le Duc d'Orléans was much occupied. His Majesty, the King of Spain had but just arrived. Then he retired, closing the door noiselessly.

Katherine sat down on a gilt-backed chair at a little French writing-table on which was a bowl of lilies.

"We came, we saw, and I think we shall conquer," she said gaily. "Experience has taught me always to ask for the great personage, and never to interview his secretary or his flunkey. We may have to wait an hour for the duke, but at the end of that time we shall certainly get the tickets which ought to have been applied for a

month ago. The *Rag* is like the British Nation. It has no system, but it generally pulls through."

"Owing," said Frank, "to the splendid abilities of its individuals. . . . I should never have had your courage, Katherine. When I saw those bowing footmen I nearly fainted."

"Pooh!" said Katherine. "This is child's play. It is nothing to some of my audacities."

They waited an hour in that little room which seemed like one of the ante-chambers of Versailles, and into which the purple twilight came through leaded window-panes. They sat on each side of the little French writing-table, and Frank talked about Marie Antoinette, Lucile Desmoulins, Madame Roland, the Princess de Lamballe and the women whose fair heads had fallen under the knife during the time of Terror. Katherine wondered whether she could die so bravely, and whether she would bare her neck for the guillotine without a tremor. Frank looked at her white neck and shuddered at the thought so that he made her laugh at his nervous imagination. . . .

How strange it was, he said, to find this Court in exile in the Worcestershire woodlands, keeping up the traditions of the old régime, guarding its relics and jealous of its blood. In the duke's service were men who bore titles famous in French history, and the ribbons and decorations of old orders of Chivalry. . . .

So they went on talking until they forgot their journalistic mission, and Frank, at least, remembered only that it was a strange, and delightful thing to sit opposite Katherine in her white silk dress in the old-world room with its fragrance of sandalwood and lilies, the scent of which would remind him always of this hour in the twilight. He started when the door was opened wide by

the powdered footman who said, "M. le Comte de Grammont."

A tall, handsome old man with a white beard, in court dress with a blue scarf across his shirt-front came in, and bowed to them with old-fashioned courtesy. He explained that M. le Duc d'Orléans was exceedingly busy, owing to the arrival of the King of Spain and his duties to his numerous guests. Perhaps he might have the pleasure of doing them some service? Katherine explained the object of her visit, speaking prettily and persuasively in French. Her vivacity seemed to win the favour of the old French aristocrat, for his eyes twinkled at her, but when he heard that she wanted two tickets for the wedding next day he raised his hand, and said, "Impossible! There is not a vacant seat."

But Katherine laughed at impossibility, and the old count gave her two of his own cards on which he wrote the words "Admission à la chapelle pour le mariage de S. A. R. Princesse la Louise de France." He did more than that, for, leading the way himself, he showed Frank and Katherine the great dining-hall where men in the old court livery were putting the last touches to tables laden with gold plate, on every piece of which were the lilies or the arms of France under the Bourbon dynasty. He led them down back-passages where servants were rushing about in a state of inarticulate excitement, and, at his questioning, explained incoherently that the King of Spain's valise had gone astray and it was but an hour to dinner! "It must be found, my friends," said the old aristocrat quietly, and then passing across the courtyard took his guests into the chapel where the princess was to be married next day to her Bourbon kinsman. The bride and bridegroom were there, and with them the duke, the King and Queen of Spain, the Queen of Portugal and a little group of foreign ladies and gentlemen who

kept at a respectful distance from the central figures in the scene. Frank and Katherine took a brief glimpse at the altar with its candles and flowers, the silk canopy and hangings, spangled with the lilies of France, the gilt-backed chairs ranged row by row; and more than one glimpse at the pale, sad face of the princess who was to be married here, at the dark, smiling, soldier-husband, at the young King, with his grave eyes and smiling mouth, and at the blonde Pretender to the throne of France who pointed out the details of the decorations to his visitors.

Then at a sign from their courtly old guide they withdrew, and in the quadrangle where the carriage was still waiting Katherine thanked him for his great kindness in her fluent, rippling French which was like music to the ears of Frank Luttrell. The old man waved his hand to them with a gracious gesture and then went back into the rambling old house, and as the hackney carriage rolled down the drive Katherine leant back and gave a gay laugh and said, "This is a scoop for you, Frank. You will be able to write an article from behind the scenes. And we have the tickets for to-morrow! The motto for journalists is '*l'audace et toujours l'audace*!'"

Frank said that Katherine was wonderful, that as a journalist he was a fool and she was a great master. He would always remember this adventure when he had gone with an enchanted princess to the court of a French King who lived in an English farm-house. Surely it was all a fairy-tale! When he looked back at the old house where lights were gleaming from every window and where the lamps on the iron gates shone upon the golden crown of France, when he saw the high moon above them as they drove along the white winding road, and the dark woods, now to the left of them, touched by its pale light, and the river below, on the right, like a silver sword drawn from its scabbard, and when he saw the lady in

white sitting by his side, so close to him that the warmth of her body seemed to creep into his heart, he was bound to believe that he was driving through dreamland from which he would awake to find himself before the fireless grate of his rooms in Staple Inn. It was all too fantastic, and fanciful and imaginative. In spite of the click-clack of hoofs on the hard road he was sure that the old horse in front of them was a nightmare which would suddenly change into the arm-chair in his sitting-room, or into the hat-rack at the office. Katherine who laughed at his incredulity tried to persuade him that all was real by taking his hand under the rug which he had wrapped round them. It was a cold hand and she warmed it by putting it on her lap and holding it fast. So they sat, rather silent now, for a mile or more, until they came into the High Street of the old Worcestershire town and pulled up at the Royal Arms, where Edmund Grattan was waiting for them with the news that the dinner he had ordered for them was already overdone.

The coffee-room of the old hostelry was in possession of the London press and of correspondents to foreign papers, among whom were several lady journalists who greeted Katherine's arrival with enthusiasm. Two or three men sat at table silently eating a heavy meal, and Frank had enough experience to know that they were Scotland Yard men. He thought he recognised one of them, who stared at him curiously, as the man who had first challenged them on the road to the farm-house with the iron gates. From an adjoining room came the sound of a stringed orchestra practising Mendelssohn's Bridal March, and the coffee-room was filled with the noise of a general conversation, of men and women's laughter, the rattle of knives and forks, the tinkle of tea-cups, and the scratching of many pens covering many slips of paper. It was a scene familiar enough now to Frank Luttrell,

special correspondent of a London journal, but different from all others because Katherine Halstead was in the crowd, sitting with two girl friends at table where he could see her as he wrote his preliminary account of the Court in Exile, and of the preparations for the Royal marriage. Several times her eyes sparkled across at him, and with the inspiration he wrote his story in words that contained some of the glamour and romance of those impressions which were still vivid in his mind. He went round to the Post Office and handed over his column of "copy" feeling that sense of relief and satisfaction which comes to every journalist when he has put his message on to the wires.

That evening Grattan organised a "sing-song" and Katherine played the accompaniments for men who sang old English songs in a throaty baritone, and sentimental ballads with tenor tenderness, and sparkling French lyrics with light-hearted grace. Frank sat in a corner with his hands behind his head and his eyes half-closed, taking no part in the music, but sensitive in a dreamy way to its harmonies. Katherine had slipped away from him into another world. A dozen men were round the piano, and she was laughing with them, and playing for them. His dream-princess was giving her beauty and her gaiety to other men, and Frank felt that he had been robbed. He was alone with himself again, in spite of the crowd in the room, and in his loneliness he comforted himself with the memory of that drive when Katherine had held his hand, and when the warmth of her body had filled him with a divine glow.

Later in the evening Katherine left the piano, and coming over to Frank, said that she was sleepy and going to bed. "The others will keep it up till midnight," she said, "for Grattan is just beginning to tell his stories."

Frank found her candle for her and lighted the way.

up a dark old staircase which had been built three hundred years ago, so that its broad oak stairs had been hollowed out by the feet of many travellers who had gone up to bed before they fell asleep for ever.

On the landing Frank held the silver candlestick over his head while Katherine peered at the numbers on the door to find her room. Standing there in the oak-panelled passage with the candle making a pool of light in the surrounding darkness it seemed to Frank that Katherine looked like one of those fair women of the past who must have stood here centuries ago before vanishing into the dream-world.

"This is my room," she said, and then held out her hand, smiling up at him. "We have had a merry day. . . . Good-night."

He put down the candle on the oak chest by the door. He was trembling a little and his voice was troubled when he took her hand and bent over it and said, "Good-night . . . princess." Then he lifted up his head and looked into her eyes, and still holding her hand drew her towards him.

"Katherine," he said, "may I have one kiss?"

She went rather white, and gave a little whispered cry as he put his arm round and kissed her on the lips, a long and lingering kiss, with his eyes shut. It was the first time Frank had ever held a woman in his arms, and he held her so close that he seemed to crush her to him, but she did not stir, and her face was close against his, and her lips clung to his lips. He did not know how long he held her like that. The divine ecstasy in which he swooned may have lasted a second only, or an hour. Suddenly she drew away from him and said, "Frank! Frank!" in a whisper. The flush of a deep red rose dyed her face and her eyes were moist with tears. She turned and seized the candlestick quickly and went into her room.

For a moment she stood in the doorway, a white figure framed in darkness with the candlelight falling upon her face and putting a glamour round her hair. It seemed that her eyes were smiling through tears, and with just one shy, tender, tremulous glance at Frank who stood motionless outside, she whispered, "Good-night!" and shut the door.

Frank stumbled to his own room on the next floor and sat on the bed in the darkness for an hour or more. He heard Edmund Grattan come upstairs with two or three men, laughing and singing. He heard boots thrown out into the passage, and doors banged. Then all was silent, and he still sat on the bed with his hands on his knees and his white face staring into obscurity. For a while he thought of nothing, but lived again in the kiss he had given to Katherine, and felt her warm body against his own, and breathed the fragrance of her hair. Then gradually he began to think, and he wondered whether she would be angry with him for his theft. He was very troubled. Perhaps she would not forgive him. For a moment of ecstasy he may have forfeited her friendship for ever. Yet she had suffered him to hold her in his arms. She had not struggled or tried to release herself, and her lips had clung to his. And afterwards though tears were trembling in her eyes, and she was very shy, she had smiled at him and said, "Good-night," and there was no anger or reproach in that glance which had gone into his soul with a white message of hope. But presently he began to reproach himself. He remembered, and groaned at the remembrance, that Katherine had promised herself to Christopher Codrington. Once before when he had asked for a kiss, she said it would not be playing the game. If it was wrong then, it was still wrong, and Frank Luttrell, journalist, who had the instincts of a gentleman, could not clear his con-

science of having betrayed a friend. Then there came into his mind some words of Margaret Hubbard's, "We must put Katherine's happiness first. . . . We must all do that." Frank thought over those words, which seemed to have a hidden meaning for him.

Which way did Katherine's happiness lie? With Codrington? The man was a careless, light-hearted, irresponsible fellow. He did not deserve the supreme gift of her beauty and graciousness and purity. Then Frank thought of himself going hand-in-hand with her down the long highway as to-day they had sat hand-in-hand, driving along the white road between the river and the woods. He would be her servant and knight. He would have no thought but for her happiness. He would be faithful to death and beyond. By that kiss their spirits had touched and joined, and were not to be divided.

So Frank, who was a boy, spoke to his own soul in that language, which comes from the heart to youth when it is first caught on fire by the pure and passionate flame.

During the next morning Frank had no opportunity of seeing Katherine alone. At breakfast she gave him one sly glance, and blushed so deeply that Grattan, who had quiet, observant eyes, looked first at her and then across at Frank in a wondering way, but with that tactfulness which was characteristic of the good-hearted Irishman, plunged into a lively story which enabled Katherine to regain her composure.

After breakfast, which was at ten o'clock, all the journalists who had come straggling down drove off in every variety of vehicle that can be got in a country town. A young journalist named Verney joined Grattan, Katherine and Frank in an open brougham, and they followed the procession of motor-cars, gigs, and pony carts up the long road between the river and the woods which had been so dream-like under the light of a silver moon.

In the quadrangle of the old farm-house, facing the pasteboard chapel which looked so venerable and substantial, there came a seemingly endless stream of automobiles from all parts of the countryside from which descended characters in costumes so strange and gorgeous, that even under the bright sun, Frank was reminded again of a scene in a pantomime. Spanish hussars in sky-blue uniforms glittering with gold lace, Italian, Austrian, Hungarian, Servian, and Roumanian officers in red and gold, green and gold, white and gold, with gold helmets or plumed hats, or shakos with white osprey feathers, members of the old French noblesse in court dress with foreign stars and orders, a Polish prince in a great bearskin hat and cloak with ropes of pearls round his neck, with glittering stones on every finger and on each of his two thumbs, and a huge flat face fringed with brown hair and thickly rouged on each cheek, princesses and *grandes dames* from the courts of Europe, women whose ugliness was redeemed by refinement and elegance, and women whose beauty had the exquisite charm and delicacy of the portraits once painted at the court of Versailles by Madame Vigée le Brun, gathered together in the courtyard of the old English farm-house and entered through the lines of powdered footmen in the Royal livery of the *ancien régime* who again were drawn up in the hall.

In a little while Frank and Katherine stood side by side in the chapel, under the sky-blue canopy spangled by the lilies of France, where an organ pealed out triumphantly, and an unseen choir of men and women's voices sang exultantly, as the bridal procession passed slowly up the nave, towards the flower-laden altar, with its tall candles; where a French priest, a kinsman of the Bourbon House, waited to solemnise this marriage between prince and princess of the Blood Royal. There was something strangely thrilling in this scene where

into the paste-board chapel there came crowned sovereigns of Europe, princes and princesses of the reigning houses, and with the uncrowned King, and the faithful adherents of a Court in Exile, which still cherishes the tradition of an ancient dynasty now passed away into the shadow land of history.

But as Frank Luttrell looked at the pale bride beneath her long lace veil, at the soldier-prince who was soon to be her husband, at the tall, blonde-bearded man in whose veins there was the blood of the Sun-King, of Henri IV., of St. Louis, and of Charlemagne, at all these gorgeous figures in blue and scarlet and white and gold, many of whom claimed names and titles famous in the annals of old French chivalry, it seemed to him that they were all ghosts, all unreal, all figures of fancy in a world of make-believe. This was not real life. The bride was not really a princess of France. These grand titles had been abolished by the Republic. The only real people were Katherine and Edmund Grattan and himself and the journalists who stood in front of the gilt-backed chairs watching the drama, making notes of costumes and scenic effects, copying down the programme of music which one of them had obtained. And it seemed to him that journalists are the only real people in the world. Life itself is but a pageant, a drama which is sometimes comedy and sometimes tragedy, with no other purpose than to provide descriptive articles to the real people who come out of Fleet Street when the curtain rings up, and go behind the scenes with their notebooks and pencils. To them everything in life is but a peep-show, and they watch a bleeding heart, a soul in agony, a face behind prison bars, a murderer in the dock, a Royal wedding, a coronation, with the same sense of detachment—sometimes rather interested, sometimes very bored, with all this mimicry, and these stage effects, but never forgetting that they are the

lookers-on, the living people in the stalls and gallery, criticising and describing the puppets and their theatrical performances.

While the music played softly and tenderly, and the bride and bridegroom knelt at the altar, and the priest prayed over them, and preached to them in French, conjuring up the old traditions of their Royal House, Frank kept his eyes on Katherine. She was the real princess, the other was only one of the puppets. She was true flesh and blood, the other was a pale ghost kneeling in a pasteboard chapel. As Katherine stood watching the wedding scene with intense, observant eyes, she was the only real person in the world to Frank Luttrell, and only if he might drink the sweetness of her lips again, and breathe the fragrance of her hair, would life be real to him. . . .

After the Royal wedding the representatives of the British and foreign press were entertained to a sumptuous banquet in the hunting museum of the uncrowned king adorned with the trophies of his sport in Africa and other lands. The Comte de Grammont in his court dress presided at the table, and Katherine sat at his right hand. Beyond, in the banqueting room, the Bourbon kings and princes and princesses, and the noblesse of their courts raised their glasses to the pale bride, and then to Louis Philippe d'Orléans, *soi-disant* King of France.

The journalists of Fleet Street were the guests of that King in exile, and he was generous in his hospitality, knowing that by their quick pens would the history of this day of solemn ceremonial be told to the world. No doubt he wanted his advertisement like other business men and he was prepared to pay for it. But unlike some business men (who do not speculate in crowns) this pretender to the throne of France treated his journalist guests as people of education and breeding. The Comte de Gram-

mont, his representative at the table, was as courteous to the members of the press as though they, also, were of the old noblesse, and perhaps he may have remembered that the writers of history belong to the old aristocracy of letters which has always been more powerful, in spite of poverty, than that of worldly rank and wealth. For they have made and unmade kings, and their pens have been sharper than swords. So he lifted his glass to them, rising from his seat, and then with a charming grace touched Katherine's glass with his own before setting his lips to it.

It was with gay spirits that all, but one, of these men and women journalists went back to Fleet Street in a special train from the country town three miles away. From the corridor-carriages the sound of laughter was wafted out of the windows to rustics who leant over five-barred gates, to children who waved handkerchiefs in the fields, and to the meek-eyed cows, who (as one of these journalists scribbling his copy in a corner would say) were standing knee-deep in the "lush grass," as the train sped swiftly through the country. Frank had a corner seat opposite Katherine and Edmund Grattan and a row of young men and women who were playing shuttle-cock and battledore with funny tales, though none could keep pace with the little Irishman. Frank was not gay in spirit. Katherine avoided his eyes, and once only on the journey looked across to him beneath her long brown lashes. There was a message in that quick glance, and Frank found that the journey was not too long while he searched his heart for an interpretation.

CHAPTER XV

Two days after this episode in the life of a journalist Frank Luttrell met Christopher Codrington in Fleet Street. This tall young man had just come back from the country, and was dressed charmingly in a fawn-coloured suit with a bowler hat to match. They went well with his golden eyebrows and his pale, clean-shaven face. Frank's face deepened in colour when Codrington raised his silver-knobbed stick on the other side of the street and then crossed the road and came towards him. He had an uncomfortable sensation. Almost for the first time in his life he avoided meeting the eyes of a friend. The truth was that since his return from Worcestershire he had taken himself severely to task for that kiss which had been stolen outside a bedroom in an old-fashioned inn. He had put himself in the dock before twelve good and true principles who had been sworn in at the old Rectory years ago; he had examined evidence on oath before the judgment seat of his conscience, and he had convicted himself of conduct unworthy of what Bellamy would call "a scholar and a gentleman." It will have been realised before now that Luttrell was not as many men are who take life as they find it, and make the most of its joyous moments without self-analysis.

Having received a verdict of guilty he proceeded to pass sentence upon the prisoner. It was what journalists like himself would call an "exemplary" one. It was banishment from the society of Katherine Halstead, except on matters of strict business. Reviewing all the circumstances of the case without bias, he concluded that,

without being even more of a cad than he had already proved himself, he could not play with temptation before which he was sure to fall. So long at least as Katherine remained engaged to Codrington he would play the game as she herself had desired, and as he had always been taught. He was very sorry for himself, and when he shut himself up in the whitewashed cell of his conscience he stared at its blank walls with all the despair of a convict on his first day of penal servitude. It was no wonder then that when Codrington, the man whose friendship he had betrayed, came towards him he felt horribly uneasy.

Christopher Codrington seemed to be enjoying a profound melancholy. He shook hands with Luttrell mournfully and then looked far away to the distant hill country of Ludgate. Luttrell asked if anything were the matter, and Codrington said that nothing mattered now. The sun had gone out of his life and he was in darkness. He was a mere shadow walking without a purpose in the night. He would be extremely glad if Luttrell would have a drink with him. He desired his sympathy and consolation.

Frank was disturbed. He wondered what calamity had overtaken this man, and he was extraordinarily moved by the thought that Codrington was seeking his sympathy—of the man who had betrayed his friendship. He asked where they could find a quiet place for a chat, and Codrington suggested the smoking-room of a tavern over the way where he was in the habit of writing his copy, and sipping "tawny port" in leisure half-hours. The two men walked across the street in silence. Codrington had the air of Sydney Carton going to the guillotine as impersonated by Martin Harvey in *The Only Way*. Two or three passers-by turned round to look at this tall young man with the grave, handsome face, an elegant bowler

hat at an oblique angle over his right eye, his silver-knobbed stick tucked under his arm, his right hand thrust deep into the breast of his light brown coat.

As he walked he sighed deeply, and Frank had the curious thought that the melancholy of a tall man must be greater than that of a short one, for his heart has to go a long way down to get into his boots.

For some time after they had taken their seats on the leather lounge in the smoking-room, which at this hour of the morning was almost deserted, Codrington smoked a cigarette with long silences between stray sentences about life and "the street." He asked Frank whether he did not think that, on the whole, the creatures of imagination were more real than those walking the highways of actuality. Frank assented to the proposition without argument. Then he said with one of his long-drawn sighs that after some years in Fleet Street the heart of man becomes callous, and less sensitive to the blows and bludgeonings of Fate. Frank who had not been a year in Fleet Street supposed that Codrington was right. Five minutes later, towards the end of a glass of port, Codrington reflected that no suffering is without value, and that the memory of golden days, though followed by tragedy, is as much as a man may hope for without presumption. Frank did not care to dispute this assertion, for it was wonderfully in accord with his own mood.

Then at last, after more vague and melancholy and philosophical axioms, Codrington turned to Frank and said with a grave courtesy—

"Luttrell, you have played your cards well. Believe me that though I am a wounded man I bear no malice."

Frank was raising a glass of wine to his lips. His face went redder than that doctored claret, and he set down the glass with a trembling hand so that the wine slopped over the brim.

"What do you mean, Codrington?" he said in a queer shaky voice. "I don't understand."

Codrington said it was all very simple, and he begged Frank not to harbour for a single moment the thought that he, Codrington, would accuse him of unfair or ungentlemanly conduct. Before Frank had come into Fleet Street Codrington had (he said) suspected, not without pain, that Katherine Halstead would pass away from him like the fair women of his dreams. They had laughed together, they had gone on gay adventures, they had been buffeted in the crowd, they had sipped the wine of life out of the same glass, as it were, and always she had been a good and tender comrade, but, alas, never—never—once—his sweetheart and heart's mistress. He had realised, with infinite sadness, as Frank would readily believe, that he had not lighted that divine fire in her soul which once in a lifetime must flame in every woman's heart. She was always virginal, cold even when most kind, keeping him aloof though they might touch hands, never coming to him with outstretched arms across that bridge which separates a man from a woman until their spirits touch and intermingle. At times she had frozen him by her cold and chaste friendship. Her light arrows of satire had hurt him, and he had bled. (Codrington held up his glass of port wine and looked at it as if it were his blood.) Her criticism of his little foibles—and Frank would know that like other men he had his peculiar weaknesses—had at times seemed too candid, even a little hard and bitter. Alas! alas! he would not reproach her with that. She had been justified, only too well. . . . Then at last it was borne home upon him that Katherine and he would never be more than friends. He knew, as though it had been told him in a vision, that one day a stranger would come riding into Fleet Street and would lift her upon his saddle and ride away with her

into the beautiful country beyond the noise and roar of the city. (Codrington paused and said, "Hark!" and from the street outside came the noise of the motor-omnibuses and the tumult of the traffic.) It so often happened like that. Into Fleet Street, now and then came people of another world—a *beau sabreur*, dashing, debonnair, who for a time had laid aside his sword for a pen; or some man with a poet's heart who came wandering into Alsatia to watch its drama for a while, to read its riddles, and then to go forth, having plucked one of the few roses that bloom in its dusty highway. These men go through Fleet Street as one phase of the adventures of life. They go through it, but they never belong to it; they are only visitants, and knights errant of the pen—like Luttrell himself.

"I have come to stay," said Frank in a low voice. "I am one of the crowd."

But Codrington raised his hand, and said, "No . . . you are one of the visitants."

Then he resumed his narrative, in which he seemed to find a melancholy satisfaction.

Every day he had waited for the stranger who would light the torch in Katherine's heart. He was bound to come, if not to-day then to-morrow, if not to-morrow then the day after. And at last he had come. When he saw Luttrell in the reporters' room——

Frank went very white and cried out, "Nonsense, Codrington; for heaven's sake, man——"

But Codrington raised his hand again and went on.

When he had seen how Katherine's eyes brightened at the sight of him, when he saw them talking over the office fire, when night after night he knew that Luttrell went to the flat in Shaftesbury Avenue, above all when Katherine became colder, more satirical, more impatient with his little foibles—which he did not disguise—and

sometimes was more hard and bitter than ever before, then he knew that the inevitable had happened.

For a time he had struggled with his fate. He had tried to win Katherine away. He had almost frightened her with the burning light of his eyes. Oh yes, he knew that she avoided his eyes and was sometimes afraid. Poor child! Poor child! He had even found it in his heart to hate his rival. He must confess to Luttrell that his handsome, boyish face, his tall, lithe figure, his Oxford manners, his rather cold, superior airs——

Frank said, "Don't!" and his face flushed hotly, but Codrington smiled with his grave sad smile and said, "I do not flatter you; I only say that these characteristics of yours filled me with a jealousy which I now regret."

But it was only for a little while. Frank's shyness—he used the simple word with diffidence—his charming amiability, his fine breadth of sympathy, his grace of spirit had stolen into Codrington's heart and won his admiration. He realised before the final blow came that Luttrell was the one man in the world who was worthy of Katherine.

Frank rose from his chair.

"Codrington, for God's sake, let us chuck this conversation. You have no idea how utterly mistaken you are. I cannot understand——"

"You must understand."

Codrington spoke almost sternly. Then he called to the waiter to bring another glass of port for himself and a claret for his friend. Frank refused the claret, but he sat down again, leaning forward over the small table upon which he had placed his arms. He would hear Codrington out and let him tell his fantastic story in his own way.

Codrington reached the climax of his narrative, and wiped some beads of sweat off his white forehead.

"Katherine gave me the *coup de grâce* last night."

He put his hand to his heart as though the wound were still bleeding, and then drank his glass of port in one breath.

"She was very kind, very good, very beautiful. She asked me to release her. God! to release her! as though I would keep any woman chained to me by any other links than love! She said that we had both made a mistake, and that our engagement ought not to drag on without a purpose. It could never end in marriage. . . . Then she thanked me for all my goodness and kindness. Ha! Ha!"

Codrington laughed in a hollow, mirthless voice which startled one man on the other side of the smoking-room who put down a pink paper to stare at him.

"She gave me back my letters, in which I had written many foolish little things, the bright fancies of summer days, the rose-tinted dreams of *nuits blanches*. . . . Luttrell, I burnt them last night after leaving her, one by one after touching it with my lips—you will understand—and, one by one, as each letter was devoured by the flames it was as though the spirit of a dream were being dissolved in the eternal ether."

He sighed deeply and was silent for a while, and Frank, stirred by a deep emotion, sat with a white face and downcast eyes.

"Thank heaven," continued Codrington, "I did not reproach her. I believe I may do myself the justice of saying that I behaved like a gentleman—an eighteenth-century gentleman, if you will forgive the allusion. I thanked her for the truest comradeship that any woman has given to any man. I told her I would always cherish the memory of the hours we had spent together as the most precious reminiscences of a life not without experience. We had a very tender hour together, and when

I left I kissed her hand for the last time, and she was good enough—you will not begrudge me this last favour, Luttrell—to touch my forehead with her lips.”

He was silent, and for a moment his face flushed with genuine emotion, and there were real tears in his eyes.

Frank raised his head and looked across at him with steady, fixed eyes. His voice was strangely calm when he said—

“Why do you tell me all this, Codrington? What has it got to do with me?”

Codrington rose to his great height and stretched out his hand.

“My dear fellow, there is nothing left for me but to congratulate you—which I do from my heart. We have been rivals and you have won; but if my friendship is worth anything to you, Luttrell, it is yours, now and always. God bless you, and be good to little Katherine!”

He held Frank’s hand in a firm grip and smiled down upon him in a kindly way. Perhaps at this moment Codrington knew that he was playing the game supremely well, and was glad as all men are when they act up to the ideals of their own personality.

Frank could not find words to express his agitation. He could only stammer out something about his never having spoken a word of love to Katherine, and that Codrington was wildly and absurdly wrong . . . though he thanked him from his heart, and would always be proud of his friendship.

But Codrington smiled, and said, “Hush! I respect your emotions. Let us go—you to your dreams and I to mine . . . but oh, how different!”

He put his hat on carefully, regarded himself for a moment in a mirror, and then strode out of the tavern with his head held high like a man who was going to face

death unflinchingly. Frank followed, feebly and foolishly, feeling a mere worm behind such nobility, but yet a worm with a wild, tumultuous spirit. In Fleet Street Codrington turned, lifted his hat in a grave, old-fashioned way, and went off with a long, melancholy stride.

Frank himself turned into the Temple and paced Fountain Court and King's Bench Walk for half-an-hour. The sun was shining on this spring day, and London sparrows were preening themselves on the edge of the basin—while the fountain sprayed a sparkling jet of water—and twittered in the trees, whose fresh leaves were still unblackened by London smoke. A breeze came up from the river across the Temple Gardens, and the day was so genial in its promise of an early summer that even lawyers walked with an elastic tread to their chambers, and lawyers' clerks were whistling for the same reason that the sparrows chirped. Frank saw and heard none of these things, yet in spite of a deep perplexity he was uplifted by a strange sense of gladness. Katherine had broken with Christopher Codrington and she was now free. That sentence kept ringing in his brain like a song. She was free! He was glad for her sake, honestly glad for her sake. That strange, unconventional engagement had not been good for her. It could have led to no certain happiness. But what did it mean to him? Why was he excited, so that his heart was fluttering with a quick, uneven beat—so that he wanted to laugh out loud with ridiculous, unreasoning joy? Codrington had spoken wild things. He had assumed things which were by no means to be taken for granted. He had shaken Frank's hand as a man who had out-rivalled him, and had won what he had lost. He had been immensely magnanimous. At least, in spite of his somewhat melodramatic melancholy, he had been really good-hearted and generous. At the thought of Codrington's words of

friendship, evidently sincere and unselfish, Frank was touched by a tender feeling for this eccentric character, and conscience-stricken at the memory of the contemptuous and ill-natured opinions he had harboured against him.

But he would be a fool if he took all Codrington's words at their face-value. As an imaginative writer and speaker, Codrington's statements had always to be discounted. No doubt it was true that some such scene as he described had taken place between Katherine and him. No doubt he had burnt those letters, one by one (and Frank was deeply moved by the thought of such self-inflicted suffering), but—what then? Was he not mad to think for a single moment that Katherine's action was intended as a message to him—Frank Luttrell? Was it not more likely that Katherine was rejoicing now in her new liberty which she would not be ready to exchange for any other bond?

Frank thought of her own words about journalists' wives. "Oh," she had said once, "it is bad to be a woman journalist . . . but Heaven preserve me from being a journalist's wife!" That made his heart sink for a moment, and he remembered gloomily what Margaret Hubbard had said. "She would never marry a poor man, to become a domestic drudge in a suburban household." He groaned aloud and frightened the sparrows who were making love on the basin of the splashing fountain, and startled a messenger boy in uniform, who was reading a blood-and-thunder novelette on a seat close to him, resting no doubt on his way with an express letter.

But the groan was hollow and artificial. Frank was only pretending. At the bottom of his heart there was a melody of gladness, for he remembered how Katherine had let him kiss her outside the bedroom door of the old inn in Worcestershire, how gaily they had gone ad-

venturing together, how her eyes had softened when she looked at him across the railway carriage on the way home, how quickly she had veiled those eyes with her brown lashes while her cheeks had deepened into blush-roses at that moment. It was impossible to despair with such memories as those, and after all his reveries in which he had tried to look the truth manfully in the face, and to thrust down all wild and wanton hopes, he felt himself buoyed up to the seventh heaven with a gladness that was beyond all reason.

With his incurable shyness Frank Luttrell deliberately avoided Katherine Halstead for several days. He only entered the reporters' room when he knew she was not there, and in the mornings went straight to Vicary to get his "assignment," and then set forth on his work whatever it might be, writing his copy later in his own room at Staple Inn, and handing it in to the sub-editor in the evening. All this time he was longing with an almost aching pain to be with her again and to speak the words which came silently to his lips when he was alone. Yet he shrank from his next meeting with her, even though he yearned for it. It seemed to him that all instincts of delicacy and good feeling bade him hold back from too quick an encounter with her after Codrington's confession. She would guess that Codrington had told him, and if he went round to the flat she would think that he had come to take advantage of her freedom. So he racked himself with exquisite agonies of self-inflicted torture, from which he derived that subtle pleasure which belonged to the medieval saints who lacerated themselves and wore hair shirts and spiked girdles for the love of God.

Then one evening he found himself on the fourth floor of the house in Shaftesbury Avenue. He had not gone there deliberately. On the contrary he had made up his

mind to write the fourteenth chapter of a work which had caught hold of his imagination in an extraordinary way during the past three weeks, so that it had compelled him to sit up half the night, or several nights a week, writing until his fingers became numb and cramped, and the fire had gone out in the grate, and he had awakened to self-consciousness with a shiver. It was curious how he had come to be writing that story. He had not sat down deliberately one day and said "Go to. I will write a book." He had finished an article one night on "The Relics of Old London." It was for the magazine page of the *Rag*. Then with his pencil in his hand he had played about with the next sheet of blank paper scribbling lines this way and that, and making grotesque patterns and designs, while his thoughts went straying to the old Rectory where his father would be sitting with the lamp shade throwing a light upon his book, or his mother would be knitting, or perhaps playing the piano in that quiet way which used to send his spirit into the dream world, when as a boy he lay on the bearskin rug, with his hands behind his head, staring up at the oak beams across the plastered ceiling. In a curious way he seemed to have got out of his body, and to be watching himself as he was years ago. He could see that small boy with the fair curling hair and his white face, with the old green-covered copy of Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, which he was not reading. And Frank Luttrell, of Fleet Street, standing like a ghost in the old room by the side of that boy who was once himself—saw the fantastic dream-fancies which seemed to take form and float to the ceiling as his mother's white fingers went wandering over the keys.

Something prompted him unconsciously—the habit, no doubt, that a journalist acquires, of putting his thoughts on to paper without effort—to write a description of that scene so vivid in his imagination—the picture of that

home-scene with the clergyman's wife at the piano in semi-darkness, dreaming over the notes; the handsome, ascetic father reading his Homer with his back turned to the table and the shade of the lamp tilted so that the light fell upon his iron-grey hair, and across his shoulder on to the book; the small boy with his elbows dug into the bearskin rug, lying on his stomach with the fairy-book under his arm, and the firelight flickering upon him, and scorching one side of his face, and making strange, fantastic shadows on the wall. Every detail of the old scene came back to Frank's memory, or rather to his imagination; for he saw the image of those things as though his eyes were looking at them now, and he heard the sounds that made up the music of his boyhood—the solemn, rhythmic beat of the grandfather clock, the rustling of the leaves of his father's book, the purring of the tabby cat whom as a child he had loved next to his father and mother, the brushing of a fir-tree against the window-pane—a strange, ghostly noise which used to affright his young soul when he was left alone in the room—the hooting of screech owls in the church tower, the laughter of village boys and girls out in the road, and, throbbing through the room, those beautiful, haunting, melting dream-melodies played by his mother, so that they made his thoughts go wandering into the elf-land of his own dreaming, in which always he was the hero, the chivalrous knight, the brave and handsome prince, the poor gallant journeyman tailor, or the wandering minstrel, who rescued fair ladies from fierce dragons and received, after many adventures, the reward of their love and beauty.

When Frank had put down this well-remembered scene and one of the beautiful dream-stories which had been built up to the melody played by his mother which now came ringing into his ears, he read over the scribbled

pages, smiling, and surprised to find that he had written them. It was as though his sub-conscious mind had been at work dictating the narrative, and that he had awakened from the dream of a dream when the words had been set down by invisible fingers. At least, he had not deliberately intended to write this composition, but when he read it through he was touched by the tenderness of the old memory which was so subtly and vividly evoked. It had pleased him to go on writing, and recalling his early impressions, his childish adventures in the Rectory garden when a snail had looked as large as a dragon, and down by the brook where he had been scared by the first sight of a water-rat—a monstrous, ferocious creature it had seemed on first acquaintance—which afterwards became an old and trusty friend to whom he delivered tit-bits saved up from his own banquets. He described many of these early comrades—the raven which his father gave him on his tenth birthday (a wise and cunning bird with a grim sense of humour), and the vagabond dog of the village, who was no one's property but everybody's friend, who would bring back a rabbit in return for a kind word and a pat on the head, and who loved best of all to go for wild adventures with a small boy, Frank, to the top of the quarry hills which touched the sky. Then there were the rabbits who, once, when he lay down to sleep in the Druids walk, sat round him in a ring, taking him perhaps for the trunk of a tree, and then when he woke up and rubbed his eyes scuttled off with bobbing white tails. He had succeeded after long and patient vigils to accustom them to his presence, and some of them became quite tame and would gambol round him and eat lettuce leaves out of his hands. They seemed to him like furry gnomes, and for some of his well-known favourites he had especial names such as Nutkin, and Puss-in-Boots, and Prince Peterkin, and Little Brown Man, and Slyface.

He used to sit on a hummocky mound and tell stories to them while they fed on the lettuces which he rooted out of the kitchen garden—not without arousing the wrath of old Ralph, who was grave-digger and gardener and coachman. Frank wrote on and on for hours amused with these childish recollections, and very much interested in that small boy who was once himself, and then he made him grow up and fall in love, and have adventures in many phases of London life, somewhat like those which Frank himself had been through but more romantic and idealised, and without any connection with Fleet Street and journalism. It was all half real and half imaginary, a romantic autobiography in which he let his imagination wander at will, leading him into episodes which had never happened, and in which he was amused to find a fellow of his own temperament. It never occurred to him that he was writing for publication. If that had been in his thoughts he would not have written so easily, so naturally, with such little concern, or with such a carelessness in construction, and indifference to public opinion. It was simply a delight in self-expression which kept him out of bed late at night, writing in his lonely room until he was too tired to write another line. And at the beginning of the fourteenth chapter, as already said before this long parenthesis, he bundled his papers in a drawer, strode out into Holborn and found that his footsteps led him willy-nilly and unswervingly to the flat on the fourth storey of the house in Shaftesbury Avenue.

Margaret Hubbard opened the door, and she said, "Well, I never did! You don't mean to say so!"

Then she took hold of his coat lapels and pulled him inside. "Why, Frank, I thought you had deserted us again!"

Frank said that he would never be a deserter from

Mother Hubbard's kingdom. To whatever part of the world he might go his footsteps would always come back to her roof-tree. But he thought it well to stay away now and again, he was so afraid of wearing out her welcome.

She took off his coat and laughed at him as a foolish fellow, and pushed him in her peremptory, bullying, masterful, cheery way into the drawing-room. Katherine was there engulfed in a deep chair with a book on her lap. She got up when Frank went in, and said, "Hulloh, Frank," in her old, familiar, comradely way. But her face flushed ever so slightly, and she avoided his eyes as they shook hands. Neither of them saw the quick glance which Margaret gave to each of them, nor the infinite tenderness of the look that came over her square, strong, motherly face.

For half-an-hour they talked "shop," and then Frank told them for the first time of his promotion and increased salary. He had hugged that secret to himself, feeling unaccountably diffident in making it known to his colleagues. He knew that both these women, though they worked as hard as he did, had smaller incomes than his own even when he had started on £4 10s. a week. Women were sweated in Fleet Street, as elsewhere. He felt that it was "beastly selfish" of him to be getting so much when they had so little.

But he had no need to feel any uneasiness on this score. There was no trace of envy in Margaret Hubbard's voice when she said—

"Bravo! Bravo! . . . Why that is the best piece of news I have heard for many a long day!"

Katherine sat up with sparkling eyes, and clasped both arms of her chair as though she had to hold herself down to restrain her excitement.

"Excellentissime, Signor Francesco! I can see the day,

when you will be a proud, rich man rolling around in a motor-car. . . . In a year or two you will be sitting aloft in an editorial chair, and we shall have to knock at your door before venturing into the high presence."

Frank carried his honours blushing and modestly, and confessed his utter bewilderment as to the reason of his good fortune. But his self-depreciation was cut short by Margaret Hubbard, who said that if he wanted to fish for compliments he must go to other waters. She never pandered to a young man's vanity in that way. Then seeing that he was actually hurt by this banter she said, "Frank, Frank, when will you harden that thin skin of yours? A sensitive plant will never flourish in Fleet Street soil."

"Mother Hubbard," said Katherine, "you are a brutal and cynical old woman. You do not understand that a sensitive temperament is just the very thing that *does* flourish in Fleet Street. Those who get hardened never get out of the rut, but people who put tenderness and imagination and poetry into their work, like our esteemed colleague here, rise to exalted places and become special article writers, and get to the heart of the big public so that they can dictate terms to editors."

"Stuff and nonsense," said Margaret Hubbard, "how can a man with tenderness dictate terms? He is always crushed by brutes without a soul."

Then she smiled over at Frank and said, "Make the most of your good fortune while you have it, Frank. Remember that Fleet Street is a hilly country, with ups and downs."

"Is that a warning?" asked Frank. "Are you going to preach a little sermon on the need of thrift and the virtue of saving up for rainy days?"

"No," said Margaret Hubbard. She was looking at Katherine rather than Frank, and said in her quiet way,

"If you will allow an old woman to give a little word of advice, I would say: Do not wait too long before you buy happiness. Do not say, 'I will wait till I am really well off before I begin to spend.' Buy as much happiness as you can, now and quickly."

"What does the dear good woman mean by that?" asked Katherine.

"I speak in parables," said Margaret Hubbard. "Perhaps Frank understands."

Frank did not quite understand, but he had a dim idea of Mother Hubbard's meaning, and it made him silent and thoughtful for a few moments.

Then he looked up and said—

"Anyhow, I would like to celebrate the occasion, don't you know. I wonder if you would come to a tea-party in Staple Inn? Neither of you has been inside my rooms, and it is about time I had a house-warming. I can promise tea and muffins, and my black kitten will play merry games with you, and we will have a box at the theatre afterwards."

"I would love to see your den," said Katherine quickly, and Margaret said that settled it, because she would have to go as chaperone. She looked shyly at Katherine and then said, "Well, I will leave you two to fix the date. I am going out."

"Going out?" said Katherine, with a surprise in which there was a trace of alarm. "Where, for goodness' sake?"

"Quite so—for goodness' sake," said Margaret Hubbard. She stood at the door for a moment looking back at them, with a curious, wondering, smiling glance and then left the room, and a moment later Frank heard the hall door close behind her, quietly.

An awkward, embarrassed silence took possession of the drawing-room. It was the first time Frank and Kath-

erine had been alone together since that evening in Worcestershire.

Katherine was the first to speak.

"I am very glad to hear of your good luck," she said. "But it is more than good luck. You have worked for it."

"Not more than the others," said Frank. "Not like you, Katherine. You are the best journalist I have ever met. I shall never forget that adventure at the palace of the king in exile."

Katherine laughed rather nervously.

"Perhaps some incidents of that adventure ought to be forgotten."

She screened her face from the fire which seemed to burn her cheeks.

Frank said that every minute of that adventure from the moment they had got into the train at Paddington was worth remembering.

Katherine avoided the issue which seemed inconvenient to her by asking whether he did not find it rather too mild for the time of year. She asked that important question as if she were seriously interested in the answer. Frank found that for conversational purposes it was well to disagree with her, and gave his decided opinion that the spring sunshine was delightful. They discussed the matter for quite three minutes and then the conversation languished, and flickered out.

Katherine seemed to be a little uneasy and restless. She crossed over to the piano and played a few bars of Handel. It was the "Lascio qu'i o pianga," and she played it with tenderness.

"Go on," said Frank, "my mother used to play that. You have no idea how I miss the old tunes."

Katherine said, "I can't play!" and then contradicted herself by playing Mendelssohn's Minnelied with a light and beautiful touch. Frank sat on a low stool behind

her, with his hands on his knees. The melody which he had heard years ago and had remembered crept into his ears and then carried his soul away on one of those winged flights by which he had been lifted up as a small boy. His spirit went wandering into the dream-world. He was with Katherine hand-in-hand walking through a wood. The sun was glinting through the trees and spangling her white dress with gold. He plucked flowers for her, and she stooped before him, smiling, and he crowned her with them. Then some brambles caught her dress, and they pricked his fingers as he pulled them away, and a little drop of blood on one of his fingers stained her white gown. . . . They wandered on and came to a hut and she said, "Let us go in and make a little home here in the woods." But she looked at him roguishly, and then ran away laughing through a vista of trees, and he followed breathlessly, and could never catch her up, until suddenly she stopped and turned and stretched out her arms to him, and every flower in the wood began to ring with silvery bells and—Katherine stopped playing the piano and the dream came to an end.

He stood up and spoke her name in a queer voice.

She had gone away from the piano and stood facing him. When he spoke she seemed a little frightened, and the colour faded from her face.

Frank went toward her. He was whiter than she was and his voice faltered.

"Katherine," he said, "Codrington told me——"

The colour flooded back to her face.

"Yes. . . . What did he tell you?"

"He told me that you and he—that you——"

He could get no further, and Katherine did not help him.

"That I?" she said, with her eyes studying the rose-pattern on the carpet.

Frank took both her hands and lifted them up to his heart, and said very humbly—

“Katherine, would it be playing the game if I were to ask you to be my wife?”

She swayed a little as he held her hands, and then said, “Oh, Frank, do not ask me . . . please, please. . . . I don’t think it is quite playing the game.”

She took her hands away from him and went over to the fireplace, and, clasping the mantelpiece, put her face down on her hands and cried.

Frank wanted to take the hands away from the tearful face so that he might kiss her. Of course he should have done so; but he stood abashed and motionless in the centre of the room and stared at the girl with grave, wondering eyes.

“I’m beastly sorry,” he said. “I didn’t want to be a cad. I only wanted to tell you that I love you. It sounds stupid, and all that, but I can truly say that I love you with my whole heart and soul. . . . Katherine, I am red-hot for you! I have never loved any other woman; and it was all very strange and glorious and wonderful when I thought, perhaps—don’t you know? But, of course—. Well, I’m not such a stupid, selfish rotter—”

She turned, and, though her eyes were wet with tears, she laughed at him as though he were irresistibly comical.

“Frank . . . what a boy you are! . . . Why are you so humble and meek?”

She mopped her eyes with her handkerchief and said, “Oh, oh, what children, we are, both of us!”

“It’s rather jolly to be kids,” said Frank, “isn’t it? We could have such good times together, you and I, Katherine. We would be children all the time, and go through all sorts of wonderful adventures, and play at make-believe behind the drawn blinds, if the world outside were

rather stupid, and make a doll's house for ourselves in some respectable suburb——"

"Hush!" said Katherine. "Hush! you mustn't!"

She was smiling at him again, and mopping her eyes like a girl who has had "a good cry" and rather enjoyed it.

"Why mustn't I?" said Frank. He was not feeling so horribly depressed, and had a little more courage. "Why did you let me kiss you in the old inn at Worcestershire?"

"It was very wrong of me," said Katherine seriously. "I can't think how I could have been so—so very wicked."

"You were very good," said Frank. "I have been in heaven ever since."

Katherine said she wanted him to be very unselfish and very patient, and she begged him not to say rash things. She was glad, she said, that Codrington had told him—what had happened. That had cleared the air a little. She had been in a very false position. But he must see that some time must go by before she could—could decently and honourably make any other engagement of the kind. It would be like a widow who rushes into matrimony before her husband's corpse is cold. Chris had behaved very nobly and unselfishly; and, besides—she owed it to Frank himself not to let him make any rash promises. Of course she had been very wrong. She had let him see that she cared for him——"

"Good God!" said Frank. "Then you do care for me?"

He went down on his knees in quite an old-fashioned way and put his arms round her waist and took one of her hands and kissed it.

"Katherine; I believe you really love me!"

"Of course I do," she said, pulling his head to her breast and touching his hair with her lips. "I loved you from the first moment I saw you."

"Well, then," said Frank, kneeling straight up and star-

ing at her with a kind of joyous amazement, "in heaven's name why can't we——?"

"Frank, Frank," she said, "I am not going to promise anything just yet. . . . I want a little time to think. I am not good enough for you. I have been thinking that I should make you very unhappy. You don't know how wicked I am."

"Unhappy? Wicked? Why, I am deliriously happy already; and you are so good that I tremble at the thought of my rotten, foolish, weak unworthiness."

"You don't understand," said Katherine. "My poor boy, you don't understand!"

When he begged her to explain she took his hand and fondled it, and said it was wonderful to her that he could think twice about such a girl.

But he did not know her. He had made a kind of shining white angel of her—she had seen that in his eyes—and it was so very far from the real truth. There was a legion of black imps in her heart—restlessness and bitterness and discontent and revolt and ambition. Yes, she must confess all that. She would never make a good wife to any man, but least of all to a poor one. Of course she was a fool—but she could never bear to give up her work and Fleet Street and the slavery which she called liberty. It had got hold of her, and she could never escape from it and settle down in domestic drudgery, to wash up tea-cups, and have an "At-Home" on first and second Thursdays, and knit her husband's socks, and get into a narrow, miserable groove.

"By the Lord!" said Frank, "I would never ask you to do that. You need not give up your work, Katherine. We would work together instead of alone."

She shook her head.

"All journalists say that to the women of their own

profession. But it doesn't work. Babies and things have a habit of coming, you know."

"By Jove! so they do!" said Frank. "But isn't that rather jolly?"

"Oh, I dare say it would be amusing for a little while, but afterwards the woman gets so tired of it all—women like me, I mean . . . selfish, restless creatures, who have got the poison of Fleet Street in their blood."

Frank was silent, stupefied. He was trying to think out some answer to his problem, but his ideas were clogged, and he could only sit dumb and miserable.

"You see how wicked I am," said Katherine, rather triumphantly at having demonstrated the fact beyond all argument. "I am one of those very women whom President Roosevelt and other great preachers are inveighing against. I shirk the responsibilities of married life. I compete with men on sweated wages. I am a disgrace to my sex. I am one of the tendencies of the modern age. . . . How awful to be a tendency!"

She laughed a little hysterically, but it was a laugh in which there was the bitterness of truth.

"I know I ought to be whipped . . . I am no longer a child. I have read Bernard Shaw and other people. I know perfectly well that I have behaved shamefully to you, my poor Frank, leading you on, enticing you, throwing myself at your head, and then denying what you want—because I am afraid of marriage. That is the way with so many professional women, poor wretches! and it is hard on the men."

"Yes," said Frank. "It is deuced rough on them."

"Of course the women can't help behaving like that. They are what the ha'penny papers call 'creatures of circumstance.' It is very wrong of them; but the whole world has got askew, and we want somebody or something to come and put it straight again."

"Meanwhile," said Frank, "what am I going to do?"

He asked the question quite simply, just like a man who has got into a very difficult and desperate situation and looks round for advice.

The directness of the question, perhaps also the look of blank misery on that handsome boy's face, disturbed Katherine Halstead uncomfortably.

"Oh," she cried, wringing her hands rather piteously, "I am a wretch! I am a wretch! . . . Why did you come to the *Rag*, Frank? Why didn't you go to some one else's *Rag*?"

"I think it was due to Philip Gibbs, who gave me the introduction to Bellamy. I must thank him for that. . . . Just fancy, but for that letter of introduction I should never have met you, Katherine, and now to feel that Fate meant us for each other from the beginning of time."

He was so serious, so grave, that Katherine became ashamed of her cruelty, as she certainly had every right to be. She took his hand again and caressed it, and said in a low voice, "Frank, you are too good for me. I could never live up to your ideal."

And just then Margaret Hubbard stood in the doorway.

"Good gracious!" she said. "What is this? Holding hands in the twilight! I can't allow that sort of thing in a respectable household."

She laughed softly, and came across the room and stood behind Frank's chair with her hands on his shoulders.

"Has anything happened since I have been away?" she asked, in a tremulous voice.

"No, nothing," said Katherine, blushing very deeply. "How absurd you are, Mother Hubbard! Did you expect the devil to come down the chimney on a broomstick?"

"No," said Margaret Hubbard. "I expected to play fairy godmother to two babes in the wood."

"You always do that, Mother Hubbard," said Frank. Then he rose and said, "I must be going."

Margaret Hubbard looked at his white, grave face, and then over at Katherine.

"I am afraid I shall have to give some one a severe talking to," she said, quite seriously.

"You mean me, of course," said Katherine.

"Yes, I mean you, Miss Kitty. This is a pretty kettle of fish, and I'll know the reason why, or I'm a Dutchman."

Frank laughed in a rather melancholy way, and then got his overcoat from the hall and said good-bye. Margaret Hubbard was off-hand with him. She said she was most annoyed with two stupid children, and she would not go to the door with him. So Katherine followed Frank into the hall, and at the door she said rather shyly, "There is no reason to be so *very* downhearted, Frank."

When he shook hands with her she bent forward a little with an invitation he was quick to accept. He put his arms round her for one moment and kissed her on the lips.

Then he went out and she shut the door behind him softly, and he wondered whether he was immensely happy or immensely miserable. It was a curious state of mind for any young man.

CHAPTER XVI

THREE weeks had gone by since Luttrell had said good-bye to Peg in the Battersea Park flat on the night before Brandon's return from the murder trial. She had gone suddenly out of his life as she had come suddenly into it, and he had so many emotions of his own that he could not afford much time for thinking of that extraordinary girl and of her poor tortured spirit. For he had sometimes remembered with a rather "creepy" sensation the dreadful moment when in a wild hysterical cry she had made a passionate appeal to him, and said things which he had tried to forget. As it often happens in Fleet Street, Brandon and he, though belonging to the same office, had not met for more than a few minutes since his return. Frank had been very busy inside and outside the office, and Brandon had as usual been diving into his queer haunts for the tragic stories which were his special line of business. The only conversation they had had on the subject of Peg was when Brandon had come up to him and with a hard hand-grip said, "I am deeply obliged to you, Luttrell." Frank said, "Not at all, Brandon," and then, after a moment's hesitation: "I want to have a serious talk with you. I can't help feeling that you are doing quite the wrong thing by—by that girl." Brandon gave him a quick glance of surprise and said, "Think so? . . . By all means, let us talk it out. I should value your advice." But then they had been interrupted by Vicary, who sent Frank away to interview a cowboy baronet from Australia, and the opportunity for discussion had not yet come. It was not likely to come for a few days at least,

because, as Luttrell heard from Codrington, Brandon had been sent into the country again on some crime story which had not yet found its way into print. Frank's thoughts went straight to that flat in Battersea Park which held the unfortunate girl to whom Brandon's going away was always a misery. No doubt Brandon had rushed off in a hurry or he would have said something, or left a message.

Frank was deeply perplexed. He felt that he ought to go round and see the girl, but he shrank from it with something like fear. Already he had suffered on account of his good-nature. He would not soon forget that *mauvais quart d'heure* when he had to parry Katherine's questions in a disingenuous way which was hateful to him, and Peg's extraordinary ignorance of the conventional moral code was not only fearfully embarrassing, but dangerous. These thoughts stirred him exceedingly, and after deciding that he would cut himself adrift from an acquaintance which, after all, was not of his making, he decided, with a swift inconsistency, to go round and see how Peg was getting on. His nature would not allow him to leave the girl to go to the devil because it was inconvenient to him to give her a word of help and advice. But he would have to postpone that visit until the next day at least. He had arranged with Margaret Hubbard, who accepted on behalf of Katherine and herself, that the celebration of his promotion should take place that evening. They were coming at six o'clock to his rooms at Staple Inn, and he had already engaged a box for *Lohengrin*. Obviously he could not put off such a red-letter event in his career. He had not seen Katherine since the strange and stirring conversation that had taken place between them three nights before. Their separate work had brought them to the office at different hours, and he had been excited by alternate moods of

joy and despair when he thought—as he did every minute of the day except when he forced his brain to write his copy for the paper—of Katherine's surprising, torturing, bewitching and unreasonable behaviour. He resolved, at least, to adopt her advice and not be too "downhearted." At least this gala night should be ever-memorable and joyful.

By good luck things were slack at the office, and Frank was able to get away in the afternoon to superintend the decorations of his room.

He bought a wonderful bouquet of white flowers. It cost him ten shillings in Covent Garden, and when he carried it wrapped up in blue paper along Holborn to Staple Inn people turned round attracted by the perfume of arum lilies and lilies of the valley which trailed an incense behind him as he walked. He wondered whether the few vases and tumblers in his rooms would be sufficient to display the beauty of these flowers, so that his barely-furnished chambers might be made fragrant and decorated for Katherine's coming. It seemed to him almost too good to be true that in a little while she would be sitting in his one arm-chair in the room where he had spent so many lonely hours, thinking and dreaming of her. Once, in the late evening, she had seemed to sit in that chair, as a spiritual presence, evoked by his imagination. Now she would be there in her beauty of flesh and blood, and he would hear her laughter, and her words of comment upon his books and pictures and poor treasures. The thought filled him with nervousness as well as with joy. A girl like Katherine would see many faults in this small kingdom of his. He knew that his books were too dusty. They would begrime her fingers if she touched them. There was a hole in his carpet where he had dropped his cigarette one night when he dozed off to sleep in front of the fire, waking with the smouldering smell in his nos-

trils. His prints and sketches were tacked up anyhow on the walls. The shelves were littered with pipes and rubbish. It was a poor place in which to receive his princess; but perhaps her kindness would overlook all these things, and the flowers would hide some of the ugly corners. Then, too, he had engaged the services of a young charwoman with a bright Irish face and a cheery way of dealing with dirt. She had promised to make everything as spick and span as might be, to have a bright fire burning in the sitting-room, to get the tea-things ready and to toast the muffins. Upon her fidelity and good sense depended the success of the first part of the evening's programme, which was to include *Lohengrin* and a little supper in Soho.

Frank sprang up the old spiral staircase to his rooms with an excitement which made his pulse thump to a gay tune. He opened his door with his latch-key, and whistled a bar of *The Harmonious Blacksmith* as he hung up his hat in the hall. He could already smell the toasting muffins. Molly was doing her duty!

But Molly came out into the passage with a rather flushed face.

"Sure, an' there's one of the young women come already," she said in a whisper, jerking her thumb towards the sitting-room.

"Surely not!"

"She don't look very well, poor thing. She struck me as very queer, entirely."

Frank was startled. It was already an hour before the time when he expected Katherine and Margaret Hubbard, and he had to get into evening dress. Perhaps something had happened. Perhaps Katherine had come to say that Vicary wanted her for an evening engagement. His heart sank with the horror of the thought. Was the gala night to be spoilt after all?

He strode into the sitting-room, prepared to meet his fate like a man. But instead of Katherine Halstead he saw another girl, and at the sight of her he stood still in amazement. It was Brandon's "Peg."

She was in a black dress, with a big black picture hat, beneath which her face was a dead white. Her eyes were swollen with weeping and there were dark rims round them. She was sitting huddled up on the window seat with her elbows on the ledge and her pointed chin propped in the palm of her hand, and she was staring down upon the swirling traffic in Holborn.

"Good heavens, Peg!" said Frank. "What are you doing here?"

At the sound of his voice she started up and came towards him, with her hands outstretched, groping forward in a blind kind of way. She seized hold of one of his hands, and raising it to her face as she bent over it, burst into tears, saying, "Frank! Frank!" in a hoarse whisper, with strange little moans.

Frank was more thoroughly frightened than he had ever been in his life before. As Peg raised her tear-stained face and put one hand on his shoulder, leaning forward as though she would lay her head upon his breast, her breath came into his nostrils with a faint pungent odour. It was the smell of brandy.

"Sit down, Peg," he said, thrusting her away with his arm, almost roughly, as she came close to him again with her groping, clinging hands. "What have you come here for?"

"Oh, my Gord! You are angry with me. Don't be angry with me, Frank. I've been suffering that awful."

She raised her hands to her head and pressed her temples and moaned.

"Be quiet," said Frank. "Don't you understand?—I can't have any scene here."

He went to the door and called out, "Molly, are you there?" The girl answered, and he told her to go home now as he would not want her any more. He could do all the rest himself. "I'm just a-going, sir," said the girl. "The kettle's a-biling and the muffins are done to a turn."

"That's all right. Thanks very much, and now be off like a good girl."

A moment later the latch of the front door snapped. Frank breathed a sigh of relief. He and Peg were alone. If there was to be a "scene" no one would hear. He must get her away before Katherine and Margaret came. Good Lord!—Supposing they came when she was here?

Peg had sank back into his arm-chair and had pulled off her black hat, and let it fall on the floor by her side. Her hair was all touzled, and she pressed it back from her forehead. Her eyes were half-closed and she was giving little fluttering moans.

Frank stood looking at her, and even at that moment he was struck by this girl's strange beauty, and once again, as on the night at Battersea Park, his anger changed to pity. Frank was a boy, with natural instincts of chivalry towards women, and even to this woman who had come to disturb his happiness, and who had been drinking, he could not be unkind. Perhaps there was a strain of weakness in him where women were concerned.

"Peg, what is the matter? Tell me, why have you come here?"

She sat up, clasping the arms of the chair and looked round in a dazed way.

"For the love of Gord," she said, "give me something to drink." She put her tongue on to her parched lips and whispered, "Brandy, brandy!"

"My poor Peg," said Frank. "You have been drinking

already. . . . I have no brandy and I would not give you any if I had."

She moaned out that her head was on fire, that she must have something to drink or she would die. She looked really ill. Her eyes were dull and glazed, and her high cheek-bones were touched with colour as vivid as vermillion. Her long white fingers fluttered at her throat, as though she were choking.

Frank knew little about women, but he was suddenly overpowered by the fear that this girl was dying. He cried to her in a stifled voice to stay quietly while he made her some tea. Then he strode out into the tiny room in which there was a gas-stove. It was really a box-room, but he used it as a china-cupboard, scullery and kitchen. The kettle was boiling its heart out on the stove, and the tea-things were all ready. The muffins which Molly had toasted lay on the rack, beautifully brown.

He poured some boiling water into the tea-pot. Molly had already put the tea in. Then he carried it on the tray into the next room.

"This will do you good," he said, with the horrible cheerfulness that men and women have when they are waiting on sick people.

One of the girl's hands flopped limply on to the arm of the chair and she said, "Oh, my good Gord!" in a helpless, piteous way.

Frank poured out a cup of tea and put enough milk in it to cool it a little. His brain was working very clearly and his hand did not tremble, but he was filled with the cold terror of a man in the middle of some uncanny and horrible predicament.

"Now take some of this. I insist, Peg, and you know I am a very strong-willed person."

He spoke in the half-humorous, half-authoritative way

in which he used to talk to her sometimes at Battersea Park. The words seemed to recall her to her senses somewhat, and she stretched out a hand to take the cup. But it shook as though she had the ague, and Frank was obliged to put the cup to her lips. She gulped down some of the steaming liquid and then gave a convulsive shudder. But in a moment or two a warmth of colour spread over her face, and her eyes were not so glazed.

"Now then," said Frank, "you feel better, don't you?"

She lifted his hand and put it on the arm of the chair and stroked it.

"You've always been very good to me. That's what I call being a real pal. You've never been down on me, Frank. I knew if I could only get here, you'd be that kind."

"Why did you come here? What on earth are you here for?"

She sat up and looked at him rather wildly.

"Bill's gone away again. I couldn't stand it no longer. . . . All alone in that flat. . . . It gave me the 'orrors . . . and then I began to drink."

"That was the worst thing you could do, Peg. The very worst."

"And I'm never going back no more."

She spoke the words sullenly at first and then repeated them with an hysterical laugh. "I'm never going back no more."

Those words came to Frank's ears as though he had been struck with a blow. He looked at the clock. Nearly half-an-hour had gone by, and in another quarter of an hour Katherine and Margaret would come. He must get the girl away at once. It would never do for them to find her here—this extraordinary girl, who was still obviously intoxicated—alone with him in his rooms. What would Katherine think? She had already been suspicious

of the unknown girl, and then had forgotten her. But how could he explain her presence here? He had given his word of honour to Brandon to keep this story secret. As a man of honour he was bound by that pledge to a friend. It would be horrible if Katherine came!

"Peg," he said sternly. "You must go back at once. I will fetch a cab for you."

He went towards the door, but the girl rose with a strangled cry and clutched him by the arm.

"No!" she cried. "I'll never go back, so 'elp me Gord, I won't!"

She put her arms round him so tightly that he could not release himself, though he struggled to get free.

"Frank . . . don't be 'ard on me, don't send me back. . . . I should go mad, stark raving mad . . . you've no notion . . . I see my face in the glass, and my own eyes scare me . . . till I shriek myself silly . . . that devil, Brandon, is torturing my soul. . . . Oh! oh!"

Her voice rose to a shriek, and, clutching Frank, she fell on her knees, with her arms round his waist, weeping wildly.

"Hush!" said Frank, white to the lips. "They will hear you in the other rooms. For heaven's sake be quiet."

He seized her by the wrists and drew her up from the floor where she grovelled at his feet, and half dragged her to the arm-chair. It seemed as if the momentary effect of the hot tea had passed off and as if the spirit she had drunk had made her mad again. She staggered and swayed so that she almost fell, and Frank had to put his arms about her, before he could get her into the chair.

He leant over her.

"Peg . . . be reasonable. Try and be sensible and quiet. Don't you understand? You cannot stay here. I am expecting friends—in a few minutes. You must go away before they come."

She moaned out that she could not go. She thought he would be a good pal to her. He was not like Brandon, who was a devil to her.

She seemed to have a fierce hatred of Brandon, and Frank, who knew the man's story and how he had sacrificed himself to save her—mistakenly, madly, but yet inspired by repentance and remorse—was utterly perplexed.

"Why do you call Brandon a devil? . . . He has done everything in the world for you."

She laughed piteously, and in her wild, inconsistent way reproached herself passionately for calling Brandon a devil. He was a good angel. But that was the trouble. She could not live up to an angel. The strain made her feel utterly bad. Brandon was so cold, when he looked at her with his steel eyes it made her freeze. She was afraid of him. Yes, that was the secret. He was always so silent, and moody, and far-away. She gave him no pleasure, and could never bring any warmth to him. He had suffered her kisses as a block of stone might, and when she grew tired of that and kissed him no more he did not miss them. She had craved for his love, and he only gave her kindness and pity. She had longed for him to show that he needed her, that he could not do without her, but he only made her feel that she was a burden to him. He was her protector and school-master, but never her lover. He was never merry with her. He never laughed and said foolish things to her like Frank had done. And then he kept her alone, without a living soul to speak to except the old charwoman, who despised her as a bad character. He was ashamed to show her to his friends. He hid her as a dreadful secret. He did not understand. Oh, how could he? If he had understood even a little he would never have left her alone so often to get melancholy mad. Last time it had been

better. Frank had been so good, such a dear boy to her. For the first time in her wretched life she had seen a glimpse of happiness. When he had gone away she missed him frightfully. When Brandon went away this time she was almost glad because she thought Frank would come again. But two days had gone by, and she had stared herself blind out of the window watching for him. This afternoon, when she knew that he would never come again she had gone out into the Battersea Park Road and bought a shillingworth of brandy at the grocer's shop. She had called at the chemist's first to buy a shillingworth of poison, but she could not remember the name of one—her wits were dazed—and the man looked at her so curiously that she was afraid, and when he had asked for her name and address she believed he was going to send for a policeman. Oh, the brandy had done her good. It had put a little pluck into her heart, and had given her grit enough to call a cab and drive her to Staple Inn. On the way she had sung softly to herself, except when she cried. She had been terribly happy in that cab driving through the London streets towards him. The passing lights had dazzled her eyes, and the cab went so swiftly it seemed as if she were flying through the air, and she laughed, just like a child going to a party, as she had seen them in the old days when she used to cry at the sight of them. All the way she was sure that Frank would be good to her and let her stay. He would never send her back to that awful place from where she had escaped. He would let her drudge for him, and perhaps he would like it if she kissed him. She had gone to sleep for a minute or two in the cab, and had dreamed that she was kissing him and that he smiled at her. Then she woke up with a jerk when the cab stopped, and she paid the man her last five shillings. He swore at her and called her bad names, but she had left him

swearing, and groped her way upstairs feeling glad and afraid at the same time. When she found he was out she said she would wait, and then she had cried in the room, and felt horribly ill, and when she stared down at the street she wondered how it would feel if she threw herself down. It had made her laugh to think that she would fall on the people's heads. How surprised they would be, wouldn't they?

She laughed then, with such a shrill, dreadful sound that Frank, who had been listening to all this wild incoherent talk standing motionless in the centre of the room almost as dazed and distracted as if he too had been drinking, cried out sharply, "Don't!"

The girl looked up, and stared at him.

"As sure as Gord is Gord," she said deliberately, "I will kill myself rather than go back to that place."

Then she began to whimper, and said he was a dear boy and she was sure he would be kind to her.

At that moment there resounded through the flat a sharp, lightly-touched, staccato tattoo on the door-knocker.

Frank started, turned as pale as death, looked wildly round the room, and then said, "Good God!" softly to himself. He could not move hand or foot. He felt like a man in a death-trap. His brain refused to work out any solution of the problem which confronted him. Behind that knock was the light hand of Katherine. What would he do? How could he explain the presence of this half-drunken girl?

At the sound of the knock Peg had risen, and with one hand on the mantelpiece stared towards the door.

"Who's that?"

Frank laughed bitterly, in a low voice.

"Those are my friends," he said. "Two ladies. No doubt you will be charmed to meet them."

For a moment he felt very cruel to this girl who had spoilt the happiness of his great evening.

"Ladies!" said Peg. "Oh, what'll I do? . . . I am that drunk and mad——"

She looked round the room as though for a place to hide. It seemed as if that knock on the door had sobered her a little.

The knock sounded again, a dainty, playful, fluttering knock—utterly unlike the dabs delivered on the door by the postman and milkman and charwoman and other people who used the knocker.

Frank strode swiftly into the passage. At least he could not keep Katherine and Margaret waiting outside. In the few seconds it took him to reach the front door his thoughts raced swiftly round trying to find a way out of this dilemma. But he could see no way of escape.

Then he opened the door, and under the lamp in the passage outside stood Katherine Halstead. She was in her white dress with the gold sequins, and a white opera cloak was hanging from her shoulders. Her eyes seemed as bright as stars to Frank as she smiled at him and stepped into the passage.

"Mother Hubbard can't come. She has got a very bad headache and begs to be excused. I have bullied her and cajoled her, but she says she would only be like a bear with a sore head. Of course she is fearfully disappointed."

"By Jove," said Frank gravely, "I am awfully sorry, Mother Hubbard is unwell."

"Oh, I don't think she is very bad . . . and I dare say we shall enjoy ourselves. I adore the opera so much that I am quite, quite selfish."

She said, "Take hold," and turning her back to Frank slipped off her cloak into his hands. Her arms and neck were bare, and looked deliciously soft and white in the

lamp-light. If Frank had been alone with this charming girl he would have praised God that he might have her beauty all to himself, but the thought of Peg in the room a yard away made him numb with terror. But he was always so quiet, and his smile was always so serious, that Katherine did not notice that anything was wrong with him. He lifted her hand up and touched it with his lips and said, "You look very beautiful to-night, Katherine."

"Come," she said, "no pretty compliments or I shall catch cold in your passage . . . what a dear little place you have here, Frank!"

She went in front of him into the sitting-room as though to take possession of his rooms. For a moment Frank's heart seemed to stand quite still, and there was a singing in his ears. How should he introduce Peg, how should he explain her?

"What a jolly fire!" said Katherine. "It was chilly in that cab with these naked arms of mine."

Frank stood inside the doorway, and his eyes roved round the room. Peg had vanished! God! what had she done? Beyond was the door leading into his slip of a scullery. It was ajar by an eighth of an inch. The girl was hiding in there!

Frank went cold. The situation was worse than ever. How could he say, "Katherine, a girl is hiding in there. I am sorry I cannot tell you her name or anything about her. She is a friend of mine, and I hope you will excuse her being intoxicated." What should he do? Dear God, what should he do?

The situation of course was really rather comical. If Frank had been a bright, breezy person with a cool head and a sense of humour and the gift of telling a white lie well, he might have got out of the difficulty by introducing Peg as the charwoman who had obtained access to his decanter. It is true that Peg did not look like a char-

woman, for she was exactly like one of Rossetti's dream-women or one of Burne-Jones's saints. But then her cockney dialect would be convincing enough.

Unfortunately for Frank he was not a bright, breezy person with a sense of humour and a cool head. At that moment any sense of humour he might have possessed had gone a thousand miles away from him, and so far from having a cool head he was in a pitiable state of nervous perplexity. Then, too, he had no gift for telling white lies, being of a serious and truthful nature . . . and he was utterly inexperienced in melodramatic situations of this kind. No doubt Codrington would have played the game skilfully, and at least made the best of a bad case. Frank merely felt as if he had been stricken with idiocy.

Katherine held her white hands out to the fire and warmed herself. Then she turned round and looked at the room.

"What a pretty little crib!"

"Do you like it?"

"Oh, it is sweet and old-fashioned. I had no idea you lived in such luxury."

She went over to the window and opened the lattice to put her head out into Holborn, looking down upon the lights of London, and the swirling traffic, and the advertisements which flashed out in red letters, and then disappeared and then reappeared.

"My word!" she said, drawing in her head again. "That ought to give you inspiration, Frank. It is wonderful."

"One gets used to it."

"Yes, I suppose so. . . . Even the Alps would get monotonous if one saw them every day."

She went round the room staring at the prints and sketches and photographs on the wall.

"Very pretty, Frank . . . oh, delightful . . . that is your mother, I am sure."

"Yes, that is my mother. How did you know?"

Frank wiped some beads of cold sweat off his forehead. He was wondering how long Peg would keep quiet.

"She is like you . . . the eyes and the mouth are the same. I would like to know her, Frank."

"I hope you will one of these days."

"You say that rather coldly. I believe you think we should quarrel!"

Katherine gave a ripple of laughter and looked across at him rather roguishly.

"She would love you at first sight," said Frank.

"Oh, I am not so sure. She would think me a very frivolous, worldly young person."

Katherine sank on the floor in billows of chiffon and scanned the books in a low case.

"Um, um, . . . Béranger's 'Chansons,' 'L'Histoire littéraire de France,' 'L'Abbé Constantin,' George Meredith's 'Poems,' 'Peter Ibbetson,' Hazlitt's 'Spirit of the Age'" —she read through some of the titles and picked out a volume here and there, putting her pretty nose into its pages.

"I should love to browse among all these," she said.

"Why not?" said Frank. "Every one of them is at your service."

He heard a movement through the open door of the scullery, and it made his pulse beat with a sickening thud.

"Those old books are dusty. Take care they do not make you dirty, Katherine."

"Yes, I suppose I must be careful in my best bib and tucker."

She sprang up from the floor with a swish of chiffon

over a white silk petticoat. The sound would have been music to Frank's ears if they had not been strained to hear the slightest noise in the adjoining room.

"Well, how about that tea?" said Katherine. "Let me help you get it in."

Her eyes softened and she blushed a little when she added—

"It will be quite like a *ménage à deux*."

Then as she moved round to the fireplace again she noticed two things which surprised her.

She saw that Frank's face was white and that he had a tense, strained look. And she saw that a woman's hat lay on the floor by the side of a flat-topped coal-scuttle, on which was a tray with tea-things that had recently been used.

She picked up the hat, and said in a wondering way—"Whose is that?"

Frank knew that his moment had come. It was a relief to him, for the strain on his nerves had been too severe.

"I had a visitor this afternoon," he said, and then stopped, not knowing what else to say.

"Did she leave her hat behind?"

Katherine asked the question with an attempt at gaiety, but it was evident that she was becoming troubled. Frank's face told her that he was strangely embarrassed. He had the look of a guilty man.

"As a matter of fact she is still here."

"Still here? Where?"

She spoke quickly, and raised her head slightly as though scenting danger.

"I think she is in that room," said Frank, pointing towards the scullery. Then he spoke rapidly and excitedly. "I can hardly explain. It is a most extraordinary situation. I ask you to believe me that I had not

the slightest idea this woman was coming, and it is not by my wish that she concealed herself. She is a poor unfortunate creature, half mad with grief. I have tried to be kind to her, and she came here for help——” He was going on incoherently, but Katherine stopped him with a gesture.

“Who is this woman? . . . Why does she hide from me?”

As she spoke the door of the slip-room opened slowly, and Peg stood there holding the door-handle.

The two women stared at each other for a moment; Peg wistfully and piteously, Katherine in a kind of amazement.

That moment when the two women looked at each other seemed to Frank—who stood stock still and quite incapable of speaking or even thinking in a rational way—to have lasted an hour before Katherine turned to him with a gesture of impatience. Her face was flushed and her eyes were very troubled.

“There is something I do not understand,” she said in a low voice. “Perhaps it is well that I should not . . . I had better leave you with this—lady.”

She spoke the last word scornfully, and with her head held very straight, went towards the door.

“Katherine!” said Frank. “You are not going! . . . This is my gala night. In a little while we must be at *Lohengrin!*”

He tried to take hold of her wrist as she passed him, but she threw his hand off. “Let me go.”

Peg had come forward into the room and steadied herself by holding the back of a chair. She called out to Katherine, saying that she needn't be afraid. She was a good woman, but it would not hurt her to be in the same room with a girl who had never had her chance of being good.

Frank turned on her wrathfully.

"Silence," he said. "You have done enough harm for one day."

"Harm?" said Peg wonderingly. The word seemed to wound her and she muttered it to herself incoherently, and then cried, and said she loved the ground he walked on and she would rather die than do him any harm.

Frank strode into the hall after Katherine, who had already taken her cloak and thrown it over her shoulders.

"Katherine," he said, "you do not trust me. You are angry because this girl is here. You have some horrible suspicion. May I tell you on my word of honour——"

"Oh," said Katherine very bitterly, "I do not believe in any man's honour . . . now. They are all the same."

She put her hands up to her face and shuddered and said in a low voice—

"I did not expect this kind of thing of you, Frank."

"What kind of thing? . . . Do you insult me?"

Frank spoke with real anger. His nerves had been overstrained, and that Katherine should think evil of him when he was innocent stung him to the quick.

"It is I who have been insulted," said Katherine, stamping her foot lightly, in passionate anger—"grossly and intolerably."

She went to the door and fumbled at the latch, but could not unfasten it.

"Will you kindly open the door?" she said, compelled to turn to him for help.

Frank held the corner of her cloak in a tight grasp.

"Before I open the door for you," he said, "I must tell you that you will be sorry one day for having been so quick to think evil of me. You have not asked for any explanation. You have not given me a chance of self-defence. Do you think that is quite kind, or fair?"

It seemed that Katherine wavered. Perhaps his last words revived her sense of justice, which had been overpowered by a sudden shock of surprise and suspicion.

"I am sorry," she said. "I did not make any accusation. I do not make any . . . but oh, please open the door. I must go back to Margaret. I—I feel rather unwell."

Frank opened the door and said, "I will fetch you a cab."

He ran down the old wooden stairs and out of Staple Inn into Holborn. A hansom was passing and he hailed it, and then went back to where the white figure of Katherine stood in the dark doorway.

"We should have been driving together to the Opera," he said, as she walked by his side out of the inn. "My little dream has been broken up, all through a silly, stupid, damnable mistake."

Katherine put her hand on his arm. "Perhaps it is my mistake," she said quickly. "If so I will go on my knees to ask your forgiveness."

Frank drew a quick breath and took her hands under the archway of Staple Inn.

"Katherine!"

"Who is that strange girl?"

Frank hesitated.

"She is called Peg. She has no other name."

"Is she not the queer girl whom Quin met with you in Battersea Park?"

"Yes," said Frank. "I have been befriending her. She has had a tragic story——"

"How did you get to know her?"

Frank was silent, and Katherine withdrew her hands from him, as though she were losing confidence.

"The hateful thing is," said Frank, "that I cannot tell

you, just yet. I am under a pledge of honour to a friend."

"Do you mean to say you can't tell me anything more than that?" said Katherine. "Why did she come to your rooms to-day? Where is she going afterwards?"

Frank was wondering what answer he could give, and he could find no answer which would seem reasonable and true. "To tell you the honest truth, I cannot say."

"You cannot say!" said Katherine incredulously.

"No . . . it sounds absurd and unconvincing, and all that, but it is another man's secret. As a man of honour . . ."

"Oh, you talk too much of honour," said Katherine, so bitterly and impatiently that Frank was stricken dumb.

She stepped out of the archway into Holborn where the hansom cab was waiting.

Frank opened the doors for her, and she took her seat and gave the driver the address through the trap. Frank said "Katherine!" in a pleading, broken voice, but the driver flicked the horse and the cab went jingling down Holborn.

When Frank went back to his rooms he felt extremely sorry for himself. He could have found it an easy thing to sit on the stairs and cry like a girl. It was only a sense of humour which kept him from this weakness. Instead of crying he did what many men do when they have been swiped in the face by a sudden stroke of ill-fortune—he laughed. When he thought of the gaiety with which he had leapt up these stairs only a little while ago, with the white flowers in one hand and the latch-key in the other, and remembered how he had anticipated every moment of an evening that was to have been so delightful, there seemed a grim and devilish irony in this miserable catastrophe. But his laugh was hard and bitter and his self-pity was accompanied with a simmering an-

ger. He was very angry with Peg for having come like a witch to blight his garden of love. He was even angry with Katherine for having so quickly, so unreasonably, and so mistakenly, suspected him of evil relations with this girl. Perhaps he had been a fool to respect Brandon's secret with a Quixotic reverence for a nice point of honour. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have considered the circumstances of the case sufficiently grave to absolve them from such a pledge of confidence. Perhaps if Katherine had not been so ready to smell scandal Frank himself would not have held to the letter of his word. But she had not helped him. She had not withheld judgment until he was able to clear himself. His hesitation and nervousness had strengthened her suspicions, and she had gone away believing that he was no better than most men of loose morals. That hurt him and stung his pride. It would make him less ready to clear himself in her eyes. Surely she should have had more trust in him? Surely if she had the slightest love for him she would have known that every instinct of his character was contrary to her suspicions.

But Peg had been mad and wicked. He could never forgive her part in this tragedy of misunderstanding. When he went into the flat again words were on his lips which he had never yet spoken to any woman. It was well that he did not speak them now. . . . When he saw the girl sitting on the floor and crying bitterly with her face against his old arm-chair, he stood and looked at her silently and unable to crush her still lower to the ground by words of abuse and anger. She abased herself before him in a broken-hearted way. With a woman's intuition she had realised the evil she had done. Perhaps the loathing she had for her own character and the remembrance of her past life helped her to understand how such a girl as Katherine would shrink from her and

suspect the honour of the man to whose rooms Peg had come. She had also—in spite of her semi-intoxication—seen something in Frank's eyes which told her that the girl in white was his "young woman," and with that generosity which is often found in the hearts of women of even the lowest class she reproached herself passionately for having come between the boy who had been her "pal" and the girl of his choice.

"Oh, I am that sorry," she said several times, and she wished that she had drowned herself rather than come to Staple Inn to make a beast of herself before his friends. She got up and put her big black hat on her touzled hair and fumbled on her long black gloves, saying that she would go before she had done any more harm.

"Will you go back to the flat quietly, like a good girl?" said Frank.

She hesitated and went rather white before she said—

"Oh yes, I'll go back. I won't be troubling you any more."

But he read something in her eyes, something that made him stare at her sternly.

"You are not going to do anything rash—wicked?" he asked.

She drooped her eyes. "What do you mean by rash?"

"I'll go back with you," said Frank very quietly, "and see you safely home."

This seemed to frighten her, and she said in an eager way that she would rather go alone.

"Do you swear to me that you will go straight home?" asked Frank, and she answered yes, she would be glad to go—home.

There was something so peculiar in the way she spoke that word that Frank read a horrible significance in it. He could not trust her. He believed that if he let her out

of his sight that night, some tragedy would happen, some unthinkable thing. Once again he was the victim of a dreadful perplexity. He did not know what to do for the best. He could not keep the girl in his rooms, but even if he took her back to Battersea Park and left her there alone, she might slip out again. . . . *The river was not far off.* The thought which shaped itself in his brain made him shudder.

But while he was wondering there came another knock at his front door, and for the second time in one evening the sound gave him a shock. Who else was coming to meet this girl in his rooms and to suspect him of evil things?

But this time he did not hesitate. He was becoming hardened. Even the most sensitive man finds his emotions become less exciting if too many come crowding into a short space. "Stay here," he said to the girl quite sternly. "Do not move." Then he strode out, shut the door of the sitting-room, walked down the passage, opened the front door, and—started back with a word of amazement when he saw Brandon there.

The man's face was white, and he said in his abrupt, matter-of-fact way—

"Peg's gone—missing from the flat. Is she here by any chance?"

"Yes," said Frank, "she is here."

Brandon stepped into the passage and looked keenly at Frank with his steely eyes.

"What's she here for?"

Something in the tone of his voice made the words sound like an accusation. Frank knew that this man also suspected him. After what he had gone through that evening the thought maddened him.

"Because you are a damned scoundrel," he said fur-

iously but in a low voice. "Because you have left me the task of saving that girl from suicide."

"What do you mean?" asked Brandon. He spoke quite calmly and coldly, but there was a terrible frown on his grave, massive face.

Frank told him what he meant in a few swift, sharp, cruel sentences. He said that Brandon had made that girl the victim of his morbid desire for self-admiration. He hugged to himself the thought that he was doing a heroic thing in keeping the girl in his house. He persuaded himself that he was saving the girl from a life of degradation. But Frank could not tell him that he was degrading her to lower depths than she had ever reached in her life before. By keeping her as a prisoner in his flat, by isolating her from all companionship, he was torturing her poor soul into madness. He knew that when he left her alone she took to drink. He was a low cad to keep the girl in such conditions.

These words were spoken in a low, fierce voice, and Frank was trembling with nervous passion. But when he had finished and stood breathing heavily, half expecting an outburst of rage from Brandon, he was astonished when the man put a hand on his arm and said—

"You are quite right, Luttrell. For a moment I thought—however, let that pass. I have been a blind fool—perhaps something more of a scoundrel than I can quite believe. What's to be done?"

"Give her some companions," said Frank; all his passion cooled down by Brandon's words. "Get her some work to do."

Then he added, with a laugh in which there was a note of his former bitterness, "And do not get men like me to look after the girl. The responsibility is too great and the consequences too embarrassing."

"Tell me?" said Brandon.

Frank looked towards the closed door of his room.

"Let us go in to her," he said.

He went in and said, "Peg, Brandon is here."

The girl flushed to the eyes, and when Brandon went in she stood looking very miserable and despairing and ashamed.

"Peg," said Brandon quietly, "I came back unexpectedly. I am glad to find you with our friend Luttrell. Are you ready to come home now?"

"Oh yes, I suppose so," said Peg wearily. "I am very tired."

In a little while they all went downstairs together and Brandon put Peg into a cab. Before he got in himself he held Frank's hand in a firm grip and said, "When can I have a talk with you—to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Frank.

He stood staring at the cab as it went tinkling down Holborn, and then went back to his rooms again and sat with his head in his hands thinking of all the drama of that evening and wondering what Katherine said when she went back to Margaret Hubbard. Those two girls were thinking bad things of him, and, though he had a white conscience, he had a bleeding heart, for he was very young.

CHAPTER XVII

BEFORE Frank was out of bed next morning the postman gave a dab on the door, and he heard something rattle through the letter-box. He had a vague curiosity to know what the letters were, but he dressed and shaved before he took the trouble to get them. In the grey light of morning he thought over the events of the evening before, and the memory of them did not make a cheerful beginning to a new day.

When he went out into the passage he found two letters on the mat. One of them was addressed in a neat, woman's hand, the other had a typewritten address and he saw by the imprint on the back that it was from his office. The first was from Margaret Hubbard, and he read her few lines with eager interest.

"MY DEAR FRANK (she wrote),

"Katherine came home last night hours before I expected her and made me jump out of my skin with fright. She is very angry with you, and cried like a child before I put her into bed. I could not get a word of explanation from her, and I could only gather in a vague way that you are a very wicked fellow and have committed a dreadful crime and broken her poor heart. As I know you to be as good as gold I am sure that some foolish misunderstanding has taken place between you two children, and I shall be glad if you will look into my room at the office this morning, so that I may give you the benefit of an old woman's wisdom, and help to sweep the clouds out of your sky. I shall make Katherine

keep to her bed to-morrow as I am sure that after so many tears and sighs she will have a sick headache in the morning.

"Yours very sincerely,

"MARGARET HUBBARD.

"P.S.—I fancy Katherine is just a little bit ashamed of herself, so don't be downhearted."

This letter, so characteristic of "Mother" Hubbard that he could hear her speaking the words as he read them, and could see her restful, kindly eyes looking up at him from the paper, gave Frank Luttrell great comfort. He felt sure that with Margaret Hubbard's help he would be able to clear his character, and restore himself to his lady's grace. If Brandon played the game he would release Frank from the pledge of honour sufficiently to put himself straight with these two good women. He thought the matter out as he boiled his egg and prepared his breakfast. Then suddenly he remembered the other letter and opened it. He guessed it was a note from Vicary setting him an early task. But as he read the few typewritten words he gave a sharp ejaculation and then stared at it in dismay. It was a formal note marked *Private and Confidential* and ran as follows—

"DEAR SIR,

"I regret to inform you that I am instructed by the proprietor, Mr. Benjamin Harrison, to give you one month's notice from this date terminating your engagement with this journal.

"As this is due to the reconstruction of the Company, for which negotiations are now proceeding and the success of which depends in a large measure upon the loy-

alty and secrecy of the staff, I have to ask you to regard this notice as strictly private.

"Yours faithfully,

"RICHARD FEATHERSTONE,

"Secretary to 'The Liberal,' Ltd."

The exact and literal significance of the words was not understood by Frank Luttrell, but after reading them several times in a dazed way one meaning stood out cold and clear and unmistakable. He had received one month's notice. He was dismissed from the *Rag*!

For a while it was as though he had been struck by a heavy blow which half stunned him. Coming so soon after his promotion it was a cruel stroke. During the past few weeks he had indulged in bright ambitious hopes. He had been praised for his articles and envied by his colleagues. He had written home the good news to his father and mother (sending presents to them out of his first increased salary), and they had been overjoyed at this recognition of their son's talent, exaggerating its significance according to their pride in his achievements.

Above all, this salary which was more than enough for himself was nearly enough for two, and it had given him courage to speak to Katherine as one who could reasonably hope to provide for a wife. Now in a month's time he would be once again "without visible means of subsistence." At the thought he shivered and felt very cold and stared with blank eyes at the vision of another hard struggle on starvation pay, picking up odd scraps, racking his brains for ideas which appealed to no one but himself, writing articles with the prescience that they would join his stock of rejected addresses. That was a gloomy prospect after his short-lived success, but he would have had pluck enough to face poverty again if

he had stood alone. It was the thought of Katherine which crushed him. As a man without a job he would have to abandon his bright dream. That had been dissolved into thin air by the words in the scrap of paper before him. The best he could hope for now would be a reconciliation after the scene of last night. He would not be so great a cad as to ask her to wait for him until he could build up his new career. He had learnt enough of Fleet Street to know that he would have to begin at the bottom rung of the ladder if, indeed, he could get his feet on any rung.

Then he groaned aloud. This would have been hard to bear anyhow. But, oh, it was harder a thousand times because Katherine was angry with him. He could not go to her for consolation. This was a double tragedy, and he had been wounded in the heart before being bludgeoned about the head. Last night Frank Luttrell had been very sorry for himself. This morning he would have sold his hopes of happiness for a threepenny-bit.

Then he read his dismissal once again with lack-lustre eyes, and suddenly he lifted up his head and said, "My God!" as though some new and startling interpretation of its meaning had been revealed to him. As an egotist, like all men born of women, he had only thought of the words as they affected himself. But now it struck him with a blinding light that he was only one out of many, that the whole staff of the *Rag* was in the same boat, which was in danger of shipwreck. They had all received these notices marked "private and confidential"—Katherine, Codrington, Brandon, Quin, Vicary, Margaret Hubbard, Braithwaite—the whole population of that human beehive! And he had been thinking miserably of his own wretched personality! He had been indulging in selfish egoism in the face of a great tragedy which involved the lives of hundreds. Supposing the paper went

under? Supposing the "hope of reconstruction" were unfulfilled? What would Katherine and Margaret do? What would all those men do who had wives and children—the composers upstairs who lived in the back streets of Peckham and Camberwell, the editorial men who kept up a "social position" in small flats at Bayswater and Hampstead and Battersea Park? Frank Luttrell with white lips cursed his stupid selfishness which had made him blind to a general catastrophe.

He hurried off to the office, and when he got through the doors into the hall leading to the business offices he saw at once that the issue of the notices had come as a bombshell into this building. Groups of men were talking in whispers, with white scared faces. The ledger clerks were doing no work, and had their heads together.

The secretary of the company, Richard Featherstone, who had signed the month's notice, was surrounded by five or six men who were talking in low, excited whispers. Featherstone was a tall, gaunt man, singularly like the worthy knight Don Quixote de la Mancha, but always smiling, bland, genial, and optimistic. As a cashier, he had paid Frank his salary week by week, and had always been effusively polite and courteous. Now he was still smiling, but his eyes were troubled, and he shrugged his shoulders again and again, and spread out his long, bony hands in a deprecating way.

"My good gentlemen," Frank heard him say, "do not take this little affair too seriously. Put the notices in Your pockets and think no more about them. It will all come right. It is the merest formality, I assure you."

Brandon looked at him with his keen, steel-blue eyes.

"If it is a mere formality it is a very stupid one. Do you think these notices can be kept secret? Why, in less than half an hour the news will be all over Fleet

Street. Then how about our advertisers? Do you think they will put their money into a sinking ship? Bah! we had better haul down the flag at once."

"My dear Mr. Brandon," said the secretary, "if all you gentlemen shut your mouths and say nothing, nobody outside will be any the wiser. The proprietor relies on your loyalty."

"A secret shared by five hundred people," said Brandon, "is no secret. Have the comps had notice?"

"Yes, a fortnight's notice," said the secretary. "The printing manager has pledged them to secrecy."

Brandon laughed ironically.

"That's all right. The secret will be well kept! . . . A fortnight, you say? In that case we can run two weeks before putting up the shutters."

"Unless the notices are withdrawn," said the secretary. "Negotiations are in progress——"

"Are they likely to be successful?" asked Brandon bluntly.

Richard Featherstone shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not?" he said. "I believe there is every hope——"

Brandon turned on his heel and walked away. Luttrell joined him, and they went up to the reporters' room.

"This is a black business," said Brandon on the stairs.

"What does it mean?" asked Luttrell.

"It means that the proprietor has gone tired, after spending £200,000. And I don't wonder. We have been a dismal failure from the first, owing to woeful mismanagement and robbery on a large scale."

"Robbery?" said Frank.

"Well, that's the wrong word—let's call it extravagance."

"How about reconstruction?" asked Frank.

"Well, there may be other big fools who want to lose

£100,000 a year. But I doubt it. There are not many millionaires like Benjamin Harrison, who is as innocent as a child, and as weak as a wax doll. Most rich men I have come across are pretty good at business. That's how they get rich."

"Then you don't think we have a chance?"

Brandon glared at him gloomily.

"I reckon we shall all be on half rations before long. . . . There is just one chance. Bellamy may get the Liberal Government to promise a peerage to some rich Jew scoundrel who wants to become an English aristocrat."

"Good Lord!" said Frank, gasping. "You're not serious, are you?"

"Why not? There's no difficulty in getting the promise of a peerage. The Liberal party don't want to see us go under, and a title more or less won't cost them anything. The difficulty will be to find the man who will buy one at a big enough price. There is a dreadful slump in the market."

In the reporters' room there was a full staff with the exception of Katherine Halstead. Even the parliamentary men had come down early to discuss the grave news. As Luttrell and Brandon went in the room was buzzing with excited talk.

Christopher Codrington was very pale, but he seemed to be the only man who was resolved to put a cheerful construction upon the notices.

"My dear good fools," he said, lifting his hand to obtain a silence which did not come, "why worry? 'Pending negotiations' is a good phrase. I stand by Bellamy. He is not the man to let this paper go under. Any doubt upon the subject is disloyalty to him. Let us give him the support of our confidence in this grave crisis."

Brandon laughed at him scornfully.

"You are always romantic, Codrington. Do you think even Bellamy can find a market for damaged goods?"

Codrington flushed angrily.

"Hush," he said. "Do not use such language, Brandon, I beg of you. It is most indiscreet."

He looked round the room as much as to say that walls have ears.

"Is all our brilliant work to go for nothing? Apart from circulation and advertisements, *The Liberal* is the greatest paper in the world."

"Why certainly," said Brandon, with deep irony. "Apart from circulation and advertisements we are almost too blatantly and indecently prosperous!"

"My God!" said one of the reporters. "I haven't dared to tell my wife yet. It would almost kill her in her present state of health."

"What I don't like," said another, "is those words 'Private and Confidential.' Why, that prevents us from going after new jobs! I don't mind saying that I shall entirely ignore the demand for secrecy. Does the proprietor think we are fools enough to work out our notices to the bitter end, and then walk out into the street without a penny to fall back on?"

Codrington again dominated the assembly. With his highly-polished silk hat at an acute angle on his head, and with his arms folded across the breast of his beautiful frock overcoat, he looked like Beau Brummel calculating his losses at Brooks's.

"I trust," he said very gravely, "that we shall not hear such words again in this room. They are nothing less than treasonable. If we have any pride and self-respect let us keep this pledge of confidence as a sacred duty. If this ship is to sink—which I utterly refuse to believe—let us go down with flying colours and doing the *Birkenhead* drill."

"In other and simpler words," said Quin, the dramatic critic, "let's play the game."

This was received with "Hear, hear!" from most of the men present.

Vicary came downstairs looking very gloomy. He was immediately surrounded by the men, who clamoured for information.

"I don't know any more than you, boys," he said. "Of course we have been running on to the rocks for some time, but the financial side was no business of mine. My job was to get news into the paper, and I have done it as well as I know how. But, of course, some of the blighters here knocked the bottom out of things. It was like building a house on a quagmire."

He gave his colleagues a few words of advice. He was going on with his job without any flim-flam, and he recommended them to do the same. "A shut mouth catches no flies" was a good old proverb with a lot of sense in it. With that oracular utterance Vicary went upstairs and sat in front of his telephone, dealing with the business of the day in his usual strenuous way.

But in the reporters' room the buzz of excited conversation continued intermittently throughout the day, as men came and went with grave faces and serious eyes; and in the passages other men collected into groups of twos and threes, whispering together. All day long Belamy remained shut up in his room, and only once or twice was he seen through the open door sitting at his desk, looking rather tired and troubled, but giving his attention to the business manager, the advertising manager, Featherstone, the secretary, and other visitors. At four o'clock in the afternoon the news was brought to the reporters' room that the proprietor's thousand-guinea Daimler had been sighted in Fleet Street. The report produced a sensation among the men, and when the pro-

prietor himself came upstairs and went to Bellamy's room, a strange silence succeeded the noise of many voices speaking together, and some of the reporters sat with anxious eyes and strained attention, and spoke only in whispers, while others went constantly into the passage to look at the editor's closed door from which no sound came out. Frank Luttrell had the sensation of living in the midst of a drama. There was something almost unreal and theatrical in this scene of men whispering and watching and waiting for something to happen, though nothing happened. It was like a scene in a play where the characters are waiting for the verdict in a murder trial, or like the ante-room of a death-chamber where men are waiting for the doctor to come out with the word that all is over. To Luttrell it seemed that both these ideas were terribly appropriate to the present case. Inside Bellamy's room there was a trial going on which meant life or death to the paper for which all these men had worked so zealously. The *Rag*, as they called it, was not an inanimate object to be bought or sold or broken up according to the balance of profit and loss. It was a real living thing. Frank, in his first fretfulness against the system, had often compared the newspaper to a grinding, devouring machine. But when *The Liberal* lay at death's door he realised that it had a life and spirituality of its own. Day by day its voice had expressed certain facts and opinions and ideals. Although many different minds were at work upon it, and many different pens filled its columns, the paper itself had only one mind, and it had a character of its own different from that of all other papers. If the paper died it would be more than the breaking up of so much type, and the shutting up of a big building, and the silence of great machines, and the absence of the familiar sheets at the breakfast-table. It would mean the death of a living

Idea, the silence of a great voice that had helped in some measure, perhaps, to shape the destinies of the nation, certainly to give men knowledge, to mould their opinions, to push forward certain causes of good or evil. To kill such a paper would be almost like murder; to let it die without every effort to save it would be a crime of callous cruelty.

And the comparison of this scene to that of a group of men awaiting a verdict of life or death was not too fanciful. To all these men the continuance or closing down of the paper meant almost that. There were elderly men who would not find it easy to begin again. Inevitably if the ship went down they would sink into the great abyss. There were young men just launched upon the sea of life—one of them had been married just a year and was the father of a one-day-old child—who would have a terrible struggle if they were washed overboard. Frank knew himself how difficult it is to get hold of any floating planks to keep one's head above water. All of these men lived up to their income, and some of them beyond it. Even a few months of enforced idleness would drag them into debt. Those with wives and children would be faced by the grim spectres of hopeless anxiety or of that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick. To all these men, therefore, the verdict that would come from Belamy's room, condemning the paper to death, or giving it a new lease of life, was of supreme and vital importance.

Few of them bolstered themselves up with false hopes. They knew more of the financial side of the paper than Luttrell, and they expected the worst. They talked ghoulishly of the death-rattle, and were already preparing for the funeral. But with that curious freak in psychology, which is always apparent when a number of people are gathered together in the presence of death or approaching death, these men were affected by a mor-

bid inclination to laugh in spite of their anxiety. Quin made gay little jests in a whisper outside Bellamy's door, which convulsed the men to whom he was talking. Even Brandon's grim jokes about corpses or coffins excited the sensibility of his audience, and more than once a gust of laughter shook the reporters' room, though Codrington, whose gravity was imperturbable, raised his hand and said "Hush" as if such hilarity were indecent. The men who laughed most were those who were most afraid. The young reporter who had the one-day-old baby at home was as white as his collar, but he laughed hysterically at any jesting remark until tears came into his eyes.

Luttrell was in the passage when the proprietor came out of Bellamy's room. He was in a long motor-coat with a big fur collar, and he hurried by in a nervous way with a flushed and rather haggard face and tired eyes. Luttrell had often seen that tall young man, who was alleged to have an income of £300,000 a year and a bank balance of three and a half millions. Before Luttrell knew him to be proprietor of the paper he had put him down as a distinguished literary man, perhaps even as a prosperous playwright, which would account for the fur round his neck. He had a long, lean, handsome face with dark, dreamy, mournful and rather haunting eyes. Luttrell had been staggered when Codrington had pointed this figure out one day as Benjamin Harrison, the millionaire. Without knowing anything of his character or history Luttrell had been struck with an indefinable pity for the man. His millions had certainly not brought him happiness. He seemed like a man overburdened with a tragic responsibility. His face when it was not animated by conversation was extraordinarily sad, and in the depths of his dark eyes there was a profound melancholy. As he passed down the stairs this evening he had a hunted

look. He was like a man who is encompassed on every hand by enemies and who is seeking a way of escape.

Silas Bellamy came out of his room now, and as he passed along the passage he heard the laughter in the reporters' room. It seemed to surprise him, and after a moment's hesitation he pushed open the door and went in. This appearance of the Chief produced an instant silence, and then Codrington said, "Is there any news, sir?"

"News? News?" said Bellamy, as though he could not understand the question. "News of what?" Then he put his hands to his eyes as though they were very tired and said "No . . . there won't be any news for a week or more. You boys must be patient. Are you downhearted?"

There was a cry of "No"; and Codrington said, "We trust the man at the helm."

"You couldn't do better," said Bellamy, smiling. Then he added, more seriously, "You may trust me at least as far as this: I will do my best for you all."

He seemed gratified when there was a unanimous and enthusiastic expression of confidence in him, and for a moment there was a twinkling moisture in his eyes.

"Who will come out and have some tea with me?"

There was a general response to the invitation, but Bellamy said, "I will have Luttrell here. He is a quiet and restful young man, and won't ask awkward questions."

Luttrell felt the honour of the choice, and blushed with pleasure and at the laughter of his colleagues.

He had tea with Bellamy in the smoking-room of an hotel in a neighboring court. The little Chief seemed to have recovered his spirits, and told funny stories as usual as though no crisis were happening. But towards the end of an hour he said, after silence during which he smoked his cigar thoughtfully—

"Luttrell, some people make me tired."

"Am I one of them?"

Bellamy laughed, and said, "No, not now, anyhow. But I don't know which is worse, a bad man or a weak one."

He was silent again, and then said with apparent irrelevance, "It will be a wicked thing anyhow, if the paper goes under. To found a newspaper is just like building a railway, say from Charing Cross to Hampstead. Every yard of the tunnel costs a lot of money, and by the time you have got within a mile of Hampstead you have spent a fortune without getting a halfpenny back. But what would you say to a railway company which stops within a mile of its terminus, just one mile before it begins to take fares?"

"It would be mad," said Frank.

"Well, Benjamin Harrison, of Bristol City, wants to stop within a mile of Hampstead," said Bellamy.

"I don't want to ask questions," said Frank, "but is there any real chance of reconstruction?"

"Oh yes, I think so," said Bellamy. Then he added less doubtfully, "Heaps of chances, of course. What I have got to do is to make one of them a certainty."

He seemed to think that he had spoken more than he ought to have done, and when he got up and put on his overcoat he said, "Don't you repeat a word of this to the boys. I think I can trust you, Luttrell."

"Oh, rather!" said Frank.

They went back to the office in silence, and Bellamy just nodded to Luttrell in a friendly way at the door of his own room. In the reporters' room Frank was questioned eagerly by his colleagues. "What did he say? Did he tell you any news?"

"Nothing whatever," said Frank. "He seemed pretty cheerful."

But the men evidently disbelieved him, and Codrington took him apart in a mysterious way down to the end of the corridor.

"Judging from your serious face," he said, "Bellamy must have told you bad news."

"He told me nothing. Absolutely nothing."

"Oh," said Codrington doubtfully. Then he added gravely, "Far be it from me to ask you to break any pledge of confidence. But naturally we are all anxious."

He asked Frank to go out and have something to drink with him. He admitted that his nerves had been seriously shaken, and he thought a pick-me-up would do them both good.

"This is a terrible affair," he said. "Terrible. Until the crisis is over I shall be living in a continual nightmare."

"What will you do if the worst happens?" asked Frank. Codrington's eyes widened with horror.

"Hush!" he said. "For God's sake . . . do not mention such a thing! It is too awful."

Luttrell was unable to go outside with him, because he was looking for Margaret Hubbard. He had been looking for her most of the day, but she had sent a note round by one of her assistants saying that she would not be at the office until four or five o'clock. It was now six o'clock, and Frank heard from the clerk-in-charge that Miss Hubbard had just arrived. He went to her room and found her working quietly at her desk. She looked up as he crossed the floor, and said—

"Well, Frank. Everybody seems to have the blues to-day. What's the meaning of those notices? Are we really doomed?"

"Goodness knows. Tell me, how is Katherine?"

Margaret smiled.

"Oh, naturally Miss Katherine Halstead's health is of

vastly more importance than the fate of five hundred other souls."

"Yes," said Frank, "to me. How is she? I am frightfully anxious."

"I don't know whether you deserve to be told. Her illness is entirely due to your own evil deeds."

She spoke with mock severity, but Frank cried out again—

"For heaven's sake, tell me—is she really ill?"

"No," said Margaret. "She is suffering from what used to be called in Jane Austen's days 'the vapours,' which means that she is angry with you and ashamed of herself, and irritable with me. She has cried herself into a feverish headache."

"Good God!" said Frank, as if a feverish headache were a deadly disease.

"Now, look here, young man," said Margaret to the man who was just a few years younger than herself. "Of course, I have got to talk to you seriously, but I am not going to lose my sense of proportion or my confidence in your respectability, so don't be scared. Who was that young woman in your flat last night? It is not my business, I know, but I fancy that it is Katherine's business, considering the proposal with which you have honoured her."

Frank hesitated.

"She has nothing to do with me," he said. "She is another man's secret, and I pledged my word to him to say nothing about it to a living soul."

"Hum!" said Margaret Hubbard. "That is awkward, certainly. Can't you produce the other man, or get him to release you from your sacred pledge?"

"Yes," said Frank. "I have been thinking it over, and I have decided to let the other man tell the story. It

will not only clear me, but I believe you will be able to help him."

"Oh, that is excellent," said Margaret Hubbard. "I have a genius for putting my finger into other people's pies. Needless to say, I always burn my own fingers."

Frank asked permission to ring the bell, and when a boy came he told him to ask Mr. Brandon to step that way.

Margaret Hubbard opened her eyes.

"Oh, it's Brandon's mystery, is it? That is characteristic of him."

When Brandon came in, looking surprised at the summons, Frank said quietly—

"Brandon, I want you to tell Margaret Hubbard about Peg."

For a moment Brandon flushed deeply, and frowned over at Frank with an ugly look on his face.

"I thought that was my secret," he said. "And I thought you were a gentleman."

"We will leave the second point out of the question," said Frank. "With regard to the first, it is no longer your secret entirely. I have been mixed up with it, and you owe it to me, I think, to clear me in the eyes of Margaret Hubbard and Katherine Halstead."

In a few words he explained the situation in which he found himself, and before he had finished the frown passed off Brandon's face.

"My dear fellow," he said warmly, "I am truly sorry. I had no idea——"

Then he turned to Margaret and said, "As a matter of fact, I was going to consult you anyhow. I want the advice of a wise, good woman. I have been making a desperate fool of myself. . . . Frank, do you mind?"

"Certainly," said Frank, and left the room, shutting the door behind him quietly.

An hour afterwards Brandon came into the reporters' room, and said in a casual way before the other men, "Luttrell, Mother Hubbard wants to speak to you."

When Frank went into Margaret's room again she was standing, waiting for him, and she took both his hands and said, "Frank, you have been a good and brave fellow. I think Katherine will admire you very much when I tell her something about this queer story. And I think she will be even more ashamed of herself, poor child."

"No," said Frank. "No. She had every right to suspect—to feel uneasy—men are such brutes."

Then he said in rather a husky voice: "I am so glad it is all cleared up . . . thanks to you, dear Mother Hubbard. What should we all do without you?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Margaret Hubbard. "You are all very troublesome and foolish children. I will give you some broth without any bread——" She stopped and then said in a kind of whisper, "Oh, oh perhaps some of us won't have any broth, or any bread either, in a little while. . . . Frank, I hardly like to think of what is going to happen to some of these young men, and old men, if the worst happens. I can only pray that the worst will not happen."

She clasped her hands and stared at him in a tragic way.

"All these husbands and fathers of children! All those poor printers and their little homes! . . . I know what it is when five or six men are thrown out of a paper. It is always a tragedy. Some of them always go under. But I have never known a great paper to go down with a full staff. Five hundred men thrown into the street at once—it is too horrible!"

Frank protested that there was every hope of reconstruction. He refused to believe that such a great paper

would be allowed to die. But Margaret Hubbard shook her head.

"We have been in a bad way for a long while. We have made no real headway. And I know from private friends that Benjamin Harrison is tired of losing his money. He has awakened to the fact that certain men here on the business side have been victimising him, and wasting his money with almost criminal extravagance. He has made up his mind to put an end to it all."

"But surely he realises all the suffering it will mean?" cried Frank.

"No, he doesn't understand."

"Can't he afford to go on losing money? We are bound to turn the corner eventually."

"It hurts him to lose money. He has got the blood of his father, who made millions by saving sixpences. I know something of his family history, and the Harrisons know how to earn but not how to spend. His money is a curse to him and for that very reason. He is haunted by the thought of losing it. He suspects every man to be a rook eager to pluck him as a pigeon . . . and there is a good deal of truth in that idea."

"Somebody will step in to buy the paper," said Frank. "It is a good hobby for a rich man."

"There are few men rich enough to lose £100,000 a year with a smiling face," said Margaret Hubbard, repeating Brandon almost word for word. "Besides," she added, looking towards the door cautiously, "there are wheels within wheels. You have no idea of the intrigues inside and outside this office. I have heard a good deal from Edmund Grattan, who knows everybody and everything in the newspaper world. Poor Silas Bellamy has got to steer his way through many cross-currents and sunken reefs."

"Is it as bad as that?" said Frank gloomily. "What shall we all do?"

"I suppose we shall have to take in each other's washing," said Margaret Hubbard, with a laugh and a brave attempt to regain her cheerfulness.

Frank had a better reason for cheerfulness.

"You will put it all right with Katherine?" he said. "Will you give her my love when you see her?"

"I'll be hanged if I do," said Mother Hubbard with the slang which she had picked up by living so much among men. "Give it her yourself, you lazy fellow."

That evening Frank acted upon Margaret Hubbard's advice and gave Katherine his love by word of mouth. He called at the flat and found that Katherine's feverish headache had entirely disappeared. But she looked very serious. The news about the office had come to her as a great shock, and, like Margaret, she was more dismayed at the thought of what would happen to all her colleagues than at the prospect of her own time of trouble if the great disaster happened. In the face of that her misunderstanding with Frank seemed insignificant and trivial. Yet she was embarrassed when he first came in, and blushed so deeply when he took her hand that Frank dared not look into her face. They were alone, for Margaret had slipped into another room and Katherine said with a brave humility—brave because she was very proud—"I have to abase myself before you. Will you forgive my foolishness? I was too utterly ridiculous, and I am very much ashamed."

"Hush!" said Frank. "Let us forget the stupid incident—or laugh at it! I behaved like a blundering idiot."

She did not say any more on a subject which still seemed painful to her, and she seemed relieved when Margaret Hubbard came back. The conversation that evening between Frank and these two women was rather

subdued and serious. The shadow of an approaching tragedy seemed to have fallen upon them. Yet it was not any selfish fear which made them dispirited and anxious. When they spoke of their own future they used brave words. They would be able to "manage" somehow or other. But it was the thought of other men and women which troubled them, and the downfall of the paper for which they had worked with a loyalty and enthusiasm which would now be made so vain and fruitless. Perhaps Frank was the selfish one. When his eyes stole over to Katherine he was full of pity for himself to think that as an honest man he would have no right to ask for an answer to the question which he had asked once before. Katherine had postponed her answer then, and now perhaps the years would slip by in a hopeless way for him.

Margaret Hubbard noticed his gloomy looks and said, "Cheer up, Frank. Never say die!"

He laughed and tried manfully to face his fate with pluck, whatever it might be. The quiet courage of these two girls seemed to him wonderful and beautiful, and he was thankful at least that they would be his comrades in any future struggle. He would not have to face the frightful loneliness of his early days as a freelance in London.

When he left the flat that evening Katherine put up her face for him to kiss, and he went out into the streets with new courage and new hope. It is strange how a woman's kiss may act like magic in a man's heart.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE month following the issue of the notices to the staff of *The Liberal* was a strain upon the nerves of the most hardened journalist of that paper. To Frank Luttrell, who was less hardened than any of them, it was a long-drawn period of suspense which made him quite feverish at night when he turned and tossed in his bed wondering whether the morrow would bring forth an official statement ending one way or the other a situation which, after the first week, had become quite intolerable. But every day came and went without the expected announcement being given. Rumours flew up and down the passages with extraordinary rapidity. Some one heard from some one else, who had been given the "straight tip" from the business manager or the advertising manager, or the secretary, or the chief leader-writer, that the negotiations had been satisfactorily completed, and that the whole staff was to be summoned into the Board Room to have their notices cancelled, and to be introduced to the new proprietors. This information, repeated at intervals from different sources, was disproved by the days which passed without such a glad assembly. Another rumour started with equal "certainty" that the proprietor was coming in that very evening after the paper had gone to bed to shut up shop. But "that very evening" passed like the others without a word from the authorities.

Many strange visitors went into Bellamy's room, or into Benjamin Harrison's room, and remained there for an hour or more, while men went whispering about the

passages, believing that the crisis was being settled. Some of these visitors had hook noses and fur-lined overcoats, the outward and visible signs of Hebrew blood and wealth. Others were gouty or wheezy old gentlemen who looked like English aristocrats, but might have been creditors pressing for the settlement of accounts in view of the ugly rumours persistent in the City as to the instability of the paper. One man was recognised unmistakably by the parliamentary reporters as the chief Liberal Whip, and perhaps it was the appearance of this important personage which accounted for the unofficial statement which buoyed up all hearts with the "fact" that the Government had agreed to subsidise the paper for a certain time, and to offer one peerage and five baronetcies to any group of men who would undertake to run the paper on strict Party lines. This seemed really generous (leaving high ethics out of the question) on the part of the Government, and the barometer rose steadily in the office until it was counteracted by a new rumour which came straight from the advertising manager's private secretary and typist. This was to the effect that the chief Liberal Whip had said, with really cruel candour, that *The Liberal* had never been worth a damn to the Party and that he would not lift a little finger to save it from that death it so richly deserved.

It was known (or at least reported) that terrible intrigues were on foot inside the office. The business manager was treacherous to Bellamy and playing a dark and subtle game of his own. The advertising manager was the leader of a campaign against all other authorities, and was attempting to raise capital among a group of Liberal Imperialists who were anxious to get hold of a big London daily. One of the leader-writers, who had been closeted for many hours with the proprietor, was hand in glove with the Temperance party in the House and coun-

try, who were ready to bring in new capital if Benjamin Harrison would put down another £50,000 and continue his position as Governing Director. One condition they made was a complete change of editorial and business control, and the junior leader-writer who was acting as intermediary in the affair was already nominated as editor-in-chief.

How much truth, if any, there was in any of these statements could not be guessed by Frank Luttrell, to whom they came from this colleague or that. At first, as each one reached him, his hopes were buoyed up or dashed down according to the character of the information, but at last, when a fortnight had nearly passed, he became deeply skeptical, and declined to give credence to anything but an official announcement of indisputable authority.

A remarkable scene took place on the night of the thirteenth day since the issue of those letters marked "Private and Confidential." It was known to every one that an announcement of some sort was bound to be delivered before midnight. The compositors were fortnightly men, and if the paper were to live another day it would be necessary, according to Trade Union rules, to re-engage them for another two weeks before they left work. Already they had been restless and almost rebellious. Indeed, when they went into the composing-room on this evening of the thirteenth, several of the men had declined to put on their aprons or do a stroke of work until their notices had been rescinded. They swore that they would not be made fools of any longer. They had gone on loyally up to the last day, believing that every day would bring good news, and they would wait no longer. They had a right to know what their fate was to be. They had a hard job to keep their wives

quiet all this while, and it was about time the situation was ended or mended.

The printing manager had a short way with rebels.

"The first man who knocks off work before the paper is through will be floored by this fist," he said, showing a row of very hard knuckles at the end of a long and brawny arm. "Then I will report him to the Union."

Having brought them back to a sense of their duty he agreed with many deep and dreadful oaths that he would get a definite statement from Benjamin Harrison that night if he had to choke it out of him. There and then he marched down to the proprietor's room, with a square jaw set in a dogged way, and with a bang on the door strode in without ceremony. In two minutes he came out again with the proprietor's pledge that he would receive the Father of the Chapel and three of the composers at three minutes before midnight, when he would fix his decision about the notices.

When the printing manager came out of the proprietor's room he was instantly button-holed by Codrington, who took him into a small room where he had a whisky bottle and glasses. Codrington beckoned Luttrell to join him and then closed the door.

"What do you want, gentlemen?" said the printer.

"I want you to have a glass of whisky," said Codrington. "It will do you good."

"I am not saying it won't," said the man, pouring himself out a stiff dose. "This is going to be a nervous sort of night. The men want a lot of careful handling upstairs. If the proprietor plays any bogey tricks with them, or refuses to give a plain answer to a plain question, there'll be something like a riot."

"Tell me," said Codrington. "What did he say, and how does he look?"

"He refused to make any statement until five min-

utes to twelve, and he looks like a man who is going to commit a murder. It is my firm belief, gentlemen, that we put up our shutters to-night. Then God help the men and their women and children."

Codrington put down his tumbler, and his whisky slopped over the brim. He was as white as a ghost, and wiped some beads of cold sweat off his forehead with a trembling hand.

"This is a terrible situation," he said. "The strain is unendurable." Then he pulled himself together a little, and said, with a kind of desperate courage, "Let us be calm, my friends. Let us play the game like gentlemen."

"There are some men in this office that never played the game in their lives," said the printing manager. He strode out of the room, and went up-stairs to his own place, and Codrington put his hand on Frank's shoulders and said, "We must see this night out, Luttrell. For the first time since the crisis I have the most gloomy forebodings."

By common consent, uncommunicated and unexpressed, the full staff of the paper remained at their posts waiting for midnight. Even the day men, who usually left the office at six or seven, stayed on, and the reporters who had finished writing their copy for the next day's paper, which many of them believed would be the last, smoked cigarettes for hour after hour, until the room was filled with a blue haze. But the men who had come in late with "stories" were still writing at their desks regardless of the buzz of conversation around them, of the shifting groups in the passages, and of the electricity in the atmosphere of this night of crisis. Whether the paper died or lived it would have to be filled to-night, and these men were faithful to the law. In other rooms the leader-writers and sub-editors were at work as usual, writing and shaping the copy which recorded the day's

history. All these men were filled with the gravest anxiety. Many of them had left weeping wives at home. The prospect was very gloomy for every man of them. But they did their duty quietly and unflinchingly. In their way they lived up to the traditions of the race. It is, perhaps, easier for a sailor to stand to the pumps on a sinking ship than for a man to pump his brains for a leading article, when he knows that in a few hours the paper may go down with all its staff.

In the reporters' room Katherine Halstead sat at her desk though she had finished her day's work, and Margaret Hubbard came from her own room to join her colleagues who were waiting for the statement. Brandon was there, silent and very moody, and Quin, desperately cheerful, and the little sporting-editor, with dark lines under his eyes, and twisting his moustache until it was a wonder a hair was left on his upper lip. The room was littered with papers, and on some of the desks were plates with the remains of meals, and coffee-cups and sloppy saucers which had been used for tobacco-ash. The atmosphere was poisoned by the stale smoke of cheap cigarettes, and at ten o'clock Margaret Hubbard, who had been talking quietly to Frank and Katherine in a corner of the room, stood up and put her hands to her throat, as though she were suffocating.

"This is awful. Let us get outside into the fresh air for a while."

"I think so too," said Frank. "Will you come, Katherine?"

They went out on to the Embankment. It was a beautiful spring night, and the air was delicious. Katherine took off her hat, and let the wind blow through her hair. "Oh, this is divine, after that awful room," she said, lifting her face up and drawing a deep breath.

"It will steady our nerves down," said Margaret Hub-

bard. "I was becoming quite jumpy and hysterical. And it is so foolish to worry oneself into fiddle-strings. Whatever happens it is not a bit of good losing self-control."

Katherine put her hand through Frank's arm.

"The poor old *Rag*," she said. "I shall cry my eyes out if it goes under."

"Oh, you emotional goose," said Margaret Hubbard. "What good will that do, I wonder? It's no good crying over spilt type."

The two girls talked of the paper's achievements, of "scoops" which had excited envy and admiration in Fleet Street, of gallant deeds done in the pursuit of news by Brandon and Codrington and others, and of the charming articles by this man or that, which had given a literary prestige to the paper. It seemed sad to them that all that work should end in failure. Frank listened to them, saying very little, but enjoying this walk with Katherine's hand on his arm. He tasted the sweetness of melancholy, and found that there is a subtle and exquisite pleasure in sharing the sadness of women friends. After all, the tragedy was one of anticipation. It might never happen, for in spite of passing moods of pessimism he had an instinctive feeling that the paper would not die. But the crisis was like a melodrama pleasantly exciting and thrilling, and if Providence were kind it might end with wedding bells, like all good melodramas.

Big Ben boomed out eleven o'clock, and Frank suggested that they should have a snack and some hot coffee before going back to the office. Margaret Hubbard accepted the idea with enthusiasm. She felt sure that Katherine must be faint with hunger. So they went into a small restaurant in a side street of Charing Cross, and there the first person they saw was Edmund Grattan. He greeted them with joyful surprise, and then lowering

his voice said, "What news, my children? I hear gloomy things of a certain office."

Margaret told him that they were waiting for the great announcement, and Grattan vowed that if he had to stay out all night he would not go to bed before hearing the verdict. It had been a real shock to him when he heard of the crisis, and the thought of the boys who would be turned out into the street if things went wrong made his heart like lead. He need hardly say that everything he had in the world, down to the shirt on his back, would be at the service of Margaret, and Katherine, and Frank, if things went badly with them for a time. He prayed God they would not be too proud to come to an old friend in time of need.

Margaret said she would certainly call for his shirt to shield her from the cold blast rather than go naked before the world.

"Ah now, you think I'm joking," said Grattan. "On my soul I swear that all I have is yours, though it's not much that I can call my own."

He seemed hurt at the laughter with which his offer had been received, but Margaret Hubbard said very gently, "We know you'll be the best of friends, and that gives us comfort."

These words restored Grattan's enthusiasm, and he seemed almost eager for the paper to go under in order that he might have some chance of showing his gratitude for all the hours he had spent in Margaret Hubbard's rooms. Frank, and certainly Katherine and Margaret who had quick, observant eyes, noticed that the little man was dressed in the deepest black as though he had just come from a funeral, and that he was drinking cold water with his meal. Frank, who had never seen him drinking anything weaker than whisky, was astonished, and he could not help remarking that he took his water

with an almost ostentatious air. But he did not say a word on the subject of his clothes or his temperance, and though once or twice he seemed to fall into a melancholy mood, and gave vent to deep sighs, he quickly roused himself and showed the warmest sympathy with the troubles of his friends. He walked back with them to the office, and said he would wait outside until Frank could oblige him by letting him know what announcement had been made.

It was a quarter to twelve, and when Frank and his companions went back to their room they found all their colleagues bending over a paper upon which Codrington was writing with an air of intense solemnity.

"Good heavens!" he said, lifting his pale face to stare at the newcomers. "Where have you been all this time? I am surprised at you leaving the office for a single minute. There is no knowing what might have happened."

"Has anything happened?" said Luttrell.

"No. But we are just sending a Round Robin to the proprietor, demanding an announcement to the editorial staff. It is beneath our dignity to rely upon the answer to the compositors. Our own fate is at stake."

"Bother dignity," said Margaret Hubbard, "but I agree that we ought to have a special statement."

Every one put his signature to the paper, and it was taken into the proprietor's room by Codrington himself. He came back with a flushed face and troubled eyes.

"The proprietor desires us to wait until he has received the deputation of men. Bellamy was with him, and from the Chief's gloomy face I am convinced that we must abandon hope."

"Well, there is not long to wait anyhow," said Margaret. "Hark! the men are going down."

All the reporters moved out into the passage, and down the stone stairs from the composing-room came four

sturdy men with their shirt sleeves rolled up and white aprons tied round them. They held their heads high, and they had the air of men who are not going to stand any nonsense. But they were very pale, and the sight of them filing into the proprietor's room made Luttrell feel curiously sick and faint for a moment. It made him realise with a sharp sense of tragedy that upon the answer to these men would depend the happiness of many little homes, and of many women and children.

They stayed in the room only ten minutes, but it seemed like an hour. Voices could be heard through the closed door, and it seemed as if the men's spokesman, the Father of the Chapel, was speaking loudly and angrily.

"My God!" whispered Codrington. "The paper dies to-night."

Then the door opened and the men came out in single file. They were still very solemn, and walked back to the stairs with a kind of stern dignity. Brandon took the Father of the Chapel by the arm.

"What's the answer?" he said hoarsely.

"The notices are withdrawn," said the man.

"Withdrawn?" said Codrington. He went very white and then gave a queer laugh as though there were tears in his throat. He turned to the group of men and women in the passage. "The notices are withdrawn! God's in His heaven and all's well with the world!"

"But only for a fortnight," said the compositor to Brandon. "We're still left in a state of bloomin' uncertainty. The Boss won't give us any definite news. It's simply a case of prolongin' the hagony."

Silas Bellamy came into the passage, and beckoned to the reporting staff.

"Come on, boys. The proprietor will speak to you."

They were joined by the leader-writers and the liter-

ary-editor. The general anxiety had abolished all differences of rank and office. Phillimore, the young literary editor, with a dead-white face and disordered hair, was next to Luttrell and said, "This strain is killing me."

"The fortnightly notices have been cancelled," said Luttrell. "It seems all right."

Phillimore shook his head.

"They are bound to do that unless the paper died to-night. But I'm told all the negotiations have failed."

The fifteen or sixteen men, with Margaret Hubbard and Katherine Halstead, went into the proprietor's room and ranged themselves at the end of the room. Benjamin Harrison was sitting at his desk staring at his red blotting-pad. He looked haggard and ill at ease, and when he raised his head and gave a quick, searching glance at the editorial staff assembled before him his eyes looked very tired and melancholy. But he roused himself into an attempt at cheerfulness and stood up with a smile flickering about his lips, grasping his coat lapels.

"I have to thank you all for your loyalty to me and the paper," he said in a low, nervous voice. "The way in which you have all respected the pledge of secrecy has been remarkable and—and—if I may so—admirable. It has been unnecessary to emphasise the fact that upon the discretion of each member of the staff depends the result of the negotiations now in progress. If you had all gone out seeking new places advertisers would have withdrawn their orders, the public would have known of our jeopardy, and the present value of the paper, such as it is, would have been destroyed. It was only because I had the utmost confidence in your loyalty that I was persuaded not to close it down a fortnight ago, and to give an extra time of grace to those who may possibly be able to rescue the paper from its peril. I regret to say that so far all our negotiations have failed, but I

am assured by Mr. Bellamy—and I have every confidence in his assurance—that there is still a good chance of reconstruction. I may say, and I hope you will believe me when I say it, that I have been untiring in my own efforts to obtain capital elsewhere in order to take over the burden which has been too heavy for me, and I have reasonable expectations in several quarters. In a few days, perhaps even in a few hours, one of these hopes will be fulfilled, in which case no one will rejoice more than myself that this paper which began with such great promise will not end in an untimely and unfortunate way. Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you heartily for the great patience and courage which you are showing in these days of—of—apprehension.”

He sat down and took up a copy of the *Westminster Gazette*, staring at the leader page as if its article on Tariff Reform and Tin Plates were of absorbing interest to him. But it was only a cover to his intense nervousness.

Brandon cleared his throat, and stepping forward a little said—

“Do you still bind us over to secrecy and to abstain from seeking new places? I speak not only for myself but on behalf of my colleagues. It will be awkward for all of us if we step straight into the street, having worked out our notices to the bitter end.”

A man’s voice trembling with suppressed emotion said in a low tone, “It will be more than awkward. It will be a damnable injustice.”

It was Phillimore’s voice. He was standing behind his colleagues, and only those near to him heard his passionate remark.

The proprietor seemed rather taken aback by Brandon’s question.

“Why,” he said, looking at Bellamy, as though for

counsel, "I think it would be well to continue the policy of secrecy. That I am sure is essential to the success of the negotiations. Is it not, Mr. Bellamy?"

"Undoubtedly," said Bellamy, pulling his moustache. "But, of course, we have no right to prevent any one from applying for a new position if he thinks fit. It is only a matter of policy. There can be no binding pledge."

"After all, gentlemen," said Harrison, looking rather wistfully over to the group of journalists, whose hopes had been utterly damped by the proprietor's vague and unsatisfactory words, "after all, I am playing your game as well as my own. We are all in the same boat, are we not?"

The words seemed to be spoken in self-defence, and there was a murmur of "Hear! hear!" from one or two of the journalists stirred to sympathy by this handsome young man, whose eyes were so unutterly mournful, and who looked almost afraid of the men in front of him, as though they were his enemies rather than his employees.

But to Luttrell's surprise Katherine Halstead answered the proprietor differently. Twisting her hands together nervously, she spoke in a clear and thrilling voice, though there was timidity in some of its tones.

"I do not think we are quite in the same boat," she said. "You are a very rich man, Mr. Harrison, and most of us are very poor. If this paper goes down you will not have to give up one of your motor-cars, nor deny yourself even a cigar. But some of us here will face starvation, and their wives and children will perhaps go hungry. That is a big difference, is it not?"

These words created something like a sensation, and the quiet "Hear! hear!" which had been uttered pre-

viously, was now repeated more loudly and almost unanimously.

The young proprietor flushed deeply and rested his hand on his forehead as he sat at his desk.

"What would you have me do?" he said in a helpless, embarrassed way.

Margaret Hubbard answered for Katherine.

"There is some truth in what Miss Halstead has said. If what we still hope will never happen does happen, would it not be fair to regard the notices as dating from the first of next month instead of the first of this month? We all wish to be loyal, but our loyalty will be your gain and our grievous loss if the worst takes place."

"What shall I gain?" said the young millionaire.

"The month's wages of the staff," said Brandon. "You admit, sir, that, but for our keeping the secret, the paper would have closed down on the night after the issue of the notices. In that case we should at least have gone out with four weeks' salary."

"Then you would have preferred me to end things on that night?" said the proprietor. He glanced across at Bellamy, who was listening to this conversation with a worried look.

Codrington stepped in front of Brandon.

"I am sure none of us wish anything so terrible," he said in a voice of solemn cadence. "We hope, indeed we believe, that this great paper has before it a brilliant and prosperous future. I for one, Mr. Harrison—and I feel sure I speak on behalf of the majority here—cannot conceive any greater calamity than the downfall of this paper, which is so impossible and incredible, that the imagination refuses to entertain the idea. There is only one watchword among us. We will be loyal to the death."

These words, uttered in Codrington's finest eighteenth-

century style, startled Benjamin Harrison, who was unused to his gifts of oratory. He was struck dumb and seemed quite bewildered. Bellamy in spite of the gravity of the situation smiled and winked at Luttrell in a comical way. Some of the men murmured angrily, others looked over at Codrington quizzingly as much as to say that after that speech nothing further was to be said. This was the view taken by the proprietor.

He rose and grasped his coat lapels again, and said, "Perhaps we had better dissolve this meeting. I am sorry that I had nothing more satisfactory to tell you. In a few days perhaps——"

He turned to Bellamy and spoke to him in a low voice, while the staff silently left the room.

"Oh, you blithering idiot!" said Brandon to Codrington. "You can't restrain your tom-fool emotion, can you."

"Thank God," said Codrington, "I was not born with the instinct of disloyalty."

The two men argued with each other, but Luttrell did not wait to hear them. He ran down the stairs to find Edmund Grattan, who was waiting for the news outside.

He saw his figure in a slouch hat and long cloak pacing up and down on the dark side of the street. Luttrell called to him, and Grattan came across into the greenish light of the lamps hanging outside the newspaper office.

"Tell me," said Grattan, "what news, my dear boy?"

In a few words Luttrell told him confidentially the vague, unsatisfactory statement which had just been made to the staff, and Grattan whistled in a dismal way.

"It looks bad," he said. "I'm afraid these lights will go out in two weeks' time. I'm sorry. I can't say how sorry I am. The poor boys! The poor girls! What will become of them all?"

He gripped Frank's arm, and said, "Courage, friend. Be of good heart! It's pluck that pulls a man through."

Katherine and Margaret came down the steps, and the men joined them.

"Come and have some dinner in Soho," said Grattan. "We will have a pleasant meal and some champagne." He corrected himself hastily and said, "At least, you will. I'm not drinking anything now."

"A cab is what I want, and then home to bed," said Margaret. "This poor child is dog-tired."

Grattan pressed them to join him at a cosy meal, but Margaret said the greatest kindness he could do them would be to call a cab. That was an easy task, for a hansom came tinkling by and the two girls got inside.

"How are you feeling?" said Frank anxiously to Katherine, as he mounted the step and shut the doors upon them.

She gave him her hand and did not answer, and Frank could see that there were tears in her eyes.

He raised her hand to his lips and then jumped down as the cab made a move.

"This is a tragic business," he said to Grattan.

"My boy," said the Irishman. "It is sheer brutality. How that young whipper-snapper with three and a half millions can abandon this great paper to its fate, regardless of ruined lives and bleeding hearts, is a mystery I can't understand. If we were in Russia his life would not be worth a kopek." He pulled Frank by the arm and dragged him into the darkness beyond the lamps.

"There he is! May he know no sleep to-night."

The thousand-guinea automobile, which was the wonder of all the newsvendors waiting for the first edition, came slowly from behind a row of carts and stopped before the office steps. Benjamin Harrison, a tall figure in a long fur-lined coat and silk hat, came through the swing doors and hurried into the car. For a moment the green lights illumined his face, and it was very white

and haggard. As soon as the door was closed the driver sounded his horn, the car panted and then glided swiftly forward through the lines of newspaper carts.

"There goes the white-livered cur!" said Grattan. "Bad luck attend him."

"There goes a very unhappy man," said Luttrell. "I pity him from my heart. I am sure he means well."

"My son," said Grattan, "Hell is paved with the souls of those who meant well."

Then he pressed Frank's arm and said, "All the same I am sorry for my hard words. You teach me a lesson in charity, my lad. Perhaps that poor young man is suffering for other people's sins. I know he has had a pack of scoundrels round him. . . . But it is not for me to judge. God forbid!"

As they walked together into Holborn he stopped under a lamp-post and said, "Do you see these black duds of mine, Luttrell?"

"Yes," said Frank. "I'm sorry if——"

"They're for my wife,—rest her soul," said Grattan very solemnly. "She died a week ago, and I could not hold her dear hand, or close her eyes in the last sleep."

His voice broke and he walked on silently. Then, in a little while, he said, "Frank, I drove her away because of my wildness, and wandering life, and Bohemian ways. She left me one night when I was drunk, and she went, poor girl, to another man who didn't drink, and who was once my best friend. She sent me a letter the night before she died imploring my forgiveness and begging me to give up the drink which she knew was still the curse of my life. . . . I had nothing to forgive. The sin was mine because I drove her to it. . . . And I have taken the pledge, which God help me to keep."

Frank tried to express his sympathy, but the Irishman interrupted him, and spoke of Margaret and Katherine as

though their troubles were of more importance than his own.

"Frank," he said suddenly, "is it the truth I hear from Codrington that you have lost your heart to little Kitty. . . . Yes? well, sure, now, that gives me joy!"

He stopped in the middle of the street and wrung Frank by the hand.

"That will give you courage," he said. "Why, man, you will be able to face the whole world on the strength of that! To work for one's woman! To carve a way through for her! To leap over any mound and ditch of difficulty that keeps you two apart! Why, that is what puts pluck into the heart of a man and makes a hero of him!"

These words and others which came glowing from the heart of the little Irishman put wine into Frank Luttrell and made him feel a stronger and braver man. He went home in the small hours of the morning strangely exhilarated, in spite of the gloomy result of the long-awaited announcement. In his new zeal to carve, as Grattan said, a way for Katherine, he turned to the manuscript story which had lain unfinished on his desk for many days now, and before he went to bed as the light of day was creeping through his window blinds added a chapter to it. The book had not been begun with the idea of publication, but now he thought that perhaps he might get a few pounds for it, which would help to tide over the barren days ahead if he should find himself again "out of a job." He determined to "keep his end up" whatever happened, and perhaps he might succeed as a novelist, if he failed as a journalist. A man of moods he plunged into pessimism and rose to the heights of optimism too easily and quickly, but perhaps it was good for him in these hours of crisis that he should find a new hope with which to buoy himself up.

CHAPTER XIX

THE next fortnight was even a greater strain than the two weeks which had just gone by. Vicary passed the word round that the paper was to be better and bigger than before. For the sake of those mysterious negotiations, which seemed to drag on interminably, it was necessary, he said, to bluff the world and Fleet Street, and to turn out the best article on the market. In his own strong and forceful language he said that "each man must do his damndest," and he put on the screw with relentless severity. Yet, to the honour of the staff, it is to be recorded that each man, and each woman, too, responded gallantly to the call. They worked ardently in their special sphere, and with two extra pages in the paper each day, they turned out some admirable and brilliant work. Brandon, who was the only one of the men to resent the attitude of the proprietor as to the notices, said with regard to all this effort and enthusiasm, "*C'est magnifique mais ce n'est pas la guerre*," but even he worked like a Trojan, and his articles on the Making of Criminals were masterly and convincing, and have not yet been forgotten.

Luttrell himself was doing ordinary reporters' work—special inquiries and descriptive reports of small happenings, and for a man of his calibre the rush and bustle of these days were wearing enough. But in the evenings when he had finished his copy, after feverish hours and the final effort of putting the result of his sight-seeing on the paper with a desperate endeavour to be bright and original, the inevitable reaction set in, and he felt that

the death of the paper would be a relief to the haunting anxiety as to its fate.

Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen days had passed, and still there was no word to say that the negotiations for reconstruction had been successful. Bellamy went away on a mysterious journey to the north of England, and came back again to shut himself up in his room, avoiding his favourites, and taking his meals indoors, when he could get half-an-hour's release from interviews with the proprietor, business manager and strange visitors who still continued to call. Now and again Codrington or Quin would get inside his room for a few minutes and come out again smiling with a funny story just narrated by the Chief, or with a message of hope to the staff. "Things are going on famously." "The negotiations are all but completed." "There are a million chances to one that we shall pull through."

But on the twenty-second day there was a decided drop in the spiritual barometer of the office. Bellamy had told Quin, and Quin whispered it to his colleagues that "things were looking very black and only a miracle could save them."

These words gave the men cold shivers, and they regarded their doom as settled. But in the midst of their despair they were excited to hilarity by the report that upon Christopher Codrington, of all people in the world, the safety of the paper now depended. For two days Codrington had been terribly mysterious, and he had been closeted with Bellamy for over two hours at a time on each of those days. On the third day he came to the office more immaculately dressed than ever, with a brand-new Gladstone-bag on the hansom in which he had rattled up to the door, and with a pocketful of gold out of which he stood drinks to Brandon and Luttrell.

At the bar of the wine tavern round the corner he

revealed, under a pledge of strict confidence to his two colleagues, that he had been provided with money, and the full financial figures of the paper, by Bellamy, and that he was about to start on a journey to the west of England to raise capital from a group of enormously wealthy men in the shipping line of business, who were keen Liberals and particular friends of himself. He had already prepared the way for his visit by long despatches which they had answered favourably, and he felt convinced that he would bring back a written guarantee for the sum required by Benjamin Harrison as earnest money for the sale of the paper.

"Luttrell and Brandon, my dear fellows," said Codrington solemnly, "this is a great hour in my career. If I can save the paper I shall consider—I hope legitimately—that all my private trespasses may be forgiven in return for this service to humanity, which, by God's grace, I am about to perform."

He shook hands solemnly with Luttrell and Brandon, as though about to depart on a perilous journey which might cost him his life.

"I will send you a private telegram," he said to Luttrell, and then raising his hat to the lady behind the bar, entered the cab which, regardless of expense, he had kept waiting outside.

Brandon and Luttrell watched his cab steering a course through the traffic until it was lost to sight. Then Brandon turned and leant against a lamp-post and laughed until the tears came into his eyes, to the surprise and amazement of the passers-by.

"To think that Codrington is our ambassador-extraordinary in search of gold!" he said when he recovered his gravity. "It will be ironical if he really raises the wind."

It was on the way back to the office that Frank heard the first news of Peg since the evening at his rooms in

Staple Inn, over a fortnight ago. He had not put a question to Brandon, and Margaret Hubbard had not given him any details as to the private interview that had taken place at the office. But now Brandon said quietly, "You will be interested to hear, Luttrell, that Peg has got a place and is no longer living with me. Thanks to Mother Hubbard she is as happy as a humming-bird, and is building up a new life for herself."

He explained that Margaret had gone several times to see the girl, and that Peg had fallen in love with her and would do anything in the world for her. Then Margaret had found her a situation in a farm-house in Surrey, which was an experiment, and a successful one, in practical philanthropy, by a woman friend of Margaret's. This lady befriended girls of the lower middle-class—mostly shop-girls and waitresses in city tea-shops—who had suffered from ill-health owing to long hours in a vitiated atmosphere, or had been the victims of those little tragedies which so often imperil the souls of girls in great cities. Under the cheerful, sane, practical and spiritual rule of this maiden lady the girls learnt dairy and poultry work, bee-keeping, and horticulture. Although designed at first as a charitable institution it had become a self-supporting business, and the girls were paid fair wages. They were a happy family of twenty, and a healthy life of fresh air and exercise in the most beautiful part of Surrey, soon restored the mental and moral balance of young women who had for a time suffered from hysteria, and melancholia, or anæmia. But they gained other good things. Mary Warrington was a woman of dominating character and of a sweet and refined temperament. The Women's Home Farm, as the place was called, was in its way a rural college, or perhaps more like a convent without strict religious rules, but under the pervading influence of a pure religious character. Although Miss

Warrington knew literally how to take her eggs to market—and always obtained the full market price—she was, according to Margaret Hubbard, a medieval saint in modern life. The tenderness of her heart, which drew forth all that was best and beautiful in the girls who came into her Home Farm, was only equalled by the mental breadth which enabled her to teach as well as to organise and to give intellectual culture as well as moral and physical health to those under her kind authority. At night she read books to the girls gathered in the great kitchen of the farm-house, which was three centuries old, and induced them to read out aloud in turns. Then she would talk to them of the great ideals and thoughts which she had gathered from many of the masters, and without any dogmatism or the pedantry of the ordinary school-mistress, gave these girls, gradually and in a simple, unaffected way, a broader outlook on life and a womanly education. She was of the old Catholic faith herself, but she never attempted to proselytise, and her girls were of all denominations and of no religious creed. But she had a kind of spiritual radiance which illumined the farm-house and its garden with the light of a pure and sweet soul, and those twenty young women, who had become dairymaids and bee-keepers and gardeners, had a devotion to her which was near idolatry. All this Margaret Hubbard had told to Brandon, and he had smiled at her enthusiasm, not believing that it could all be justified. But he had taken Peg down to the Home Farm and had met Mary Warrington and had seen the girls at work, and when he came back, leaving Peg miserable and in tears, he believed that in a little while she too would be singing as he had heard the dairymaids. It was too soon yet to know how the experiment would work out as regards Peg, whose nature was so peculiar and abnormal, but two days ago he had had a bright ill-written letter

from her, and a note from Mary Warrington to say that already the girl was beginning to cheer up and was on the friendliest terms with her companions.

"It is an enormous relief to me," said Brandon; "and my debt of gratitude to Margaret Hubbard will never be repaid."

"I am glad," said Frank. "It is the best of news."

"I will not thank you, Luttrell, for all you have done in this affair. Words are foolish things. But if ever I can do anything in the world——"

"My dear fellow," said Frank, "I have done nothing."

"You have done everything," said Brandon. He did not say any more, but he was more deeply moved than Frank had ever seen this strange, reserved man, who underneath his rather sullen nature had a strain of tenderness which was very rarely revealed.

This incident was only a passing interruption of the drama which obsessed the mind of every man on the staff of *The Liberal*, but the thought that Brandon's strange, unhappy girl should have found a home in which she had a chance of building up a new character and life was a source of real joy to Frank, who out of pity and kindness had done his best by giving a helping hand to her in the days of her great distress.

At the office the sands were running down, and only a few days remained before the fate of five hundred men would be decided. Among the few people who knew of Codrington's embassy there was no hope left, and they could only give way to an hysterical kind of hilarity. They felt that if this was the last resource of the mysterious "negotiations" the flag might be hauled down. But curiously, by some freak of psychology, the great majority of the staff had swung round to the belief that all would go well. When they approached near to the fatal day it was impossible to think of the *débâcle*. With machin-

ery throbbing down below, with all the busy hum of life upstairs, with telegrams pouring in from different parts of the world with the news of the world, with every man doing his appointed task as he had done it day after day and week after week for years, it was as difficult to think that in a short time all that thrilling life would be silenced in the death of the great paper, as it is always difficult to imagine that a strong man full of energy and spirit may drop down dead, suddenly and swiftly.

There was a kind of superstition which took the place of hope. Phillimore, the literary editor, spoke to Luttrell in the passage and said, "I am sure we are going to pull through. At the eleventh hour some rich man will come rolling up in his motor-car, bringing the money up with him. The paper cannot die. Why worry?"

He, of course, was worrying himself into fiddle-strings, but fantastic as his idea was it really represented the general feeling of the staff. "The paper cannot die. Nothing could kill a thing with such vitality. Bellamy will turn up trumps an hour before the fatal time. You bet he has a card up his sleeve."

Such words were spoken by men who at the beginning of the month had been almost broken up by the dread of ruin. And some of them had been sadly broken up. One of the reporters, who had recently left another paper to come on to the staff, believing that he was settled in life, was drinking hard, in order to get Dutch courage, and was a pitiable-looking wreck. Another, who had gone through nearly all the London newspapers, and knew that this was his last chance on earth, was in a state of maudlin misery.

Luttrell himself was so nervous and highly-strung that the banging of a door or the sudden sneeze of a colleague gave him heart palpitation. But he tried to get a grip over his will, and at least he had sufficient reserve of

strength to show a quiet front to all rumours of ruin and to all counsels of despair. On the morning following Codrington's departure he received a telegram from that romantic ambassador. It was a message of good cheer. "*Have every prospect of success.*" He showed the telegram in confidence to Brandon, Margaret Hubbard and Katherine, and on the strength of it they went to supper at the Savoy and drank a bottle of champagne to Codrington and the god of luck. Even Brandon's natural hostility to Codrington was dispelled by the great and bounding hope that he would be the *deus ex machina* by hooking a millionaire. Their mysterious cheerfulness in the reporters' room could not pass unnoticed, and a cheerful face was so unusual that four of them at one time seemed a proof to all their immediate colleagues that things were shaping well.

But on the following day Luttrell was sent for by Bellamy.

"Shut the door, Luttrell," he said, and then, "you know that Codrington went away to seek gold in the west?"

"Yes," said Luttrell, and his pulse beat quickly when he added eagerly, "has he had luck?"

Bellamy smiled.

"Codrington is very persuasive. He has got on to the right side of a chocolate manufacturer."

"Well done!" said Luttrell. "That's magnificent." He gave a deep sigh expressive of infinite relief. "Then we are all right, sir?—out of the wood?"

"Go slow," said Bellamy. "I did not say as much as that. But Codrington has drawn blood. His potentate is prepared to put down a tenth part of the amount which Benjamin Harrison demands, in return for the inestimable privilege of acquiring this paper with its monthly expenses."

"A tenth part?" said Frank. "I suppose it's impossible to get at the rest in the time?"

Bellamy laughed. "On the Conservative side the difficulty would not exist for a moment. But it is as difficult to get a true Liberal to part with money as to draw blood out of that ink-pot."

"Have all the other negotiations failed?" asked Luttrell. As Bellamy had gone so far in his confidence he felt entitled to ask the question.

"Not altogether," said Bellamy. He was thoughtful for a moment. Then he said in a weary way, "You don't know all I have done in the endeavour to save this paper, Luttrell. Nobody will ever know that. And I can honestly say it is not for myself. I am prepared to vacate this chair to-morrow—now—if that would help matters forward. I am thinking of the men and their wives and children. I know what it will mean to them if we go under. Benjamin Harrison does not understand that. I cannot make him understand. For a young man with many good qualities he seems extraordinarily callous. But it is simply sheer ignorance of Fleet Street and the conditions of life here. He thinks it will be perfectly easy for every man of them to find a new place. He thinks he has done nobly in keeping them so long. He forgets—does not realise—his terrific responsibility in having drawn them out of good positions on to this paper of his. He does not remember that they have spent their brains and bodies in his service. I assure you that night after night he has come in with intent to kill. He wanted to close up there and then. And I have had to struggle with him every night. Even now it is only a question of time. Given three months I would still save the situation. But Harrison won't give us another day, not another hour, after the end of this month. And there are only two days more. The irony of it is that he is one of

the richest men in England. How can we go touting round for capital when he is wallowing in wealth? That is the question asked by every one I have gone to. And I'm hanged if I know any answer to it."

Bellamy picked up his bayonet and handled it in a yearning way, as though it would be a joy to him to thrust it between somebody's ribs.

"Then we must abandon hope?" said Luttrell in a melancholy voice.

"Good God no," said Bellamy, looking up sharply. "Who said so? *Dum spiro spero*. Isn't that good Latin? You ought to know as an Oxford gent. . . . Look here, Luttrell, talking about Oxford, do you know any rich young fool who wants to buy a peerage and a paper? They're both going cheap."

"No," said Luttrell, "I'm sorry I don't."

"Take your time and think it out," said Bellamy. "Sit down, won't you? I'll use the opportunity for washing my hands. Filthy place this office."

Luttrell sat down, and Bellamy went to the wash-basin. It was a repetition of that scene when Luttrell had first met Bellamy, and sat in his room.

The little Chief washed his hands, and polished his nails, and brushed his hair before the looking-glass and whistled a little tune. It was the same tune which he had whistled on that day, months ago, when Frank had sat with a beating heart waiting for the words which would decide his fate. The memory of the tune came back to him, and with it the emotions of that evening. Much water had flowed under the bridges since then, but Frank's heart was filled with a strange emotion at the thought of this end to all his hopes. He never thought he would sit in this room discussing the approaching death of the great paper.

"Well?" said Bellamy.

"There is only one man I can think of. He was an idealist and an ardent Liberal when we were in the same college together. But he doesn't want a peerage. He is the Earl of Bramshaw."

"Bramshaw!" said Bellamy. "My hat, man, you don't mean to say you know Bramshaw?"

"Yes," said Luttrell. "Why not?"

"And you have been keeping him up your sleeve all this time?"

"I haven't given him a thought."

"Why, my innocent babe," said Bellamy. "He is one of the wealthiest peers in England. He has got the biggest collieries up North."

"So I believe," said Luttrell.

Bellamy banged his fist on a gong and a boy bounced in.

"Bring a Bradshaw, and be quick about it."

He opened a drawer and emptied a cash-box full of gold on to the desk.

"How much do you want?"

"What for?" said Luttrell.

"To get up to Bramshaw and do credit to your friend. Do you want a new hat?—clothes? Anyhow you will want a first-class fare, and something in your pocket in case of accidents."

He handed over ten pounds.

The boy came in with the Bradshaw, and Bellamy turned up a train.

"You had better go by the twelve o'clock. It gets to Bramshaw at five."

"I can't go without facts and figures," said Luttrell, rather overwhelmed by this sudden mission. He was wondering whether Bramshaw, who used to be the Honourable John Poyning, would be the same bright, boyish,

enthusiastic fellow with whom he had gone forth on the night of the bonfire "rag."

Bellamy told him to sit still for half-an-hour while he coached him in newspaper arithmetic, and during that half-hour Frank learnt more about the financial side of a newspaper than he had expected to know. It was a revelation to him, and he gasped at the vast and almost incredible expense of carrying on a great London journal. He could not help sympathising with Benjamin Harrison in his desire to "cut his losses." But Bellamy having shown him the black side of the books explained how in twelve months from that date the paper ought to be not only making its way, but making a good profit. He showed him the steady progression of the advertising revenue, which if it continued in the same proportion would secure the working expenses of the paper by the time named. And in his ingenious way he worked out a scheme of figures which looked, on the face of them, satisfactory and promising. "All we want," said Bellamy, "is £50,000 in addition to the sum put down by Codrington's man. For that small figure Bramshaw can dominate a powerful organ of opinion, become an important person in his Party, and enjoy one of the most agreeable hobbies open to a rich man. If you want any little thing for yourself such as an editorial chair, make your own terms. Or if Bramshaw wants to put in his own man—some heaven-sent genius of a haughty and aristocratic temperament, don't you mind me. I'm ready to hand over office to-morrow."

He shook hands with Frank, and said, "Do your best, Luttrell. Remember you will be helping the other boys and girls. Send me a wire with the most cheerful news you can."

"I'll try my hardest," said Frank. He had a flushed face and was painfully excited.

"I am sure you will," said Bellamy. "You are a scholar and a gentleman."

Frank had half-an-hour to get to King's Cross. It was not too much time, but he spent three minutes of it in whispering a few words to Katherine, who had been wondering why he had been such an unconscionable time in the Chief's room.

She became even more excited than himself, and in the passage she put her hands on his shoulders and said—

"Frank, if you save the paper I will——"

"What?" said Frank. "What?"

"I will marry you the very next day if you like."

"Honour bright?" he said. "Is that a solemn and sacred promise?"

They had both been smiling, but in the eyes of both of them there was something more than merriment.

"If you will save the *Rag*——" said Katherine in a low voice.

He bent down and kissed her on the lips.

"I am going to have a try," he said.

Then he turned and ran down the stairs, and in less than a minute found himself panting in a hansom cab on the way to King's Cross.

On the railway journey Frank studied his brief, and notebook full of figures. He was not a good arithmetician, but he concentrated his mind on those sums of newspaper mathematics and mastered them. Because upon the figures depended the fortunes of his friends and colleagues and his own happiness. If he could persuade Bramshaw he would win Katherine. The thought filled him with an almost feverish emotion. He felt quite sick with excitement. At times a gust of anxiety and hope swept through him. What a joyous thing it would be if he could save the paper! He had been a reserved, sensitive fellow among his colleagues. Some of them

had given him the cold shoulder. Some had not concealed their jealousy of his promotion. Others had looked upon him as a snob and weakling. But they would be proud of him if he did this thing. He and Codrington would be the heroes of Fleet Street. How strange that he and Codrington of all people in the office should be the means of keeping the flag flying! They had been rivals. Now they were working for the same cause, and they would share the glory. And Katherine would be his reward. It was his chance! His whole happiness in life depended upon his playing his cards well. He must keep his nerve. He must not get too excited. If only he applied to Bramshaw in the right way, calling upon their old comradeship, reminding him of his old ideals, pointing out what an enormous service he would do to the nation and the Party, he would succeed. Surely Bramshaw would not refuse! Fifty thousand pounds—it was but a bagatelle to a man who owned the biggest coal-fields of the North! Towards the end of the journey Frank went into the lavatory carriage to wash, and was startled at the bloodless, haggard face in the mirror before him, and by the burning eyes which stared at him. He must calm down. He was overwrought by this racking anxiety. He looked like a ghost, and Bramshaw would be scared at him.

When he arrived at the journey's end in the Yorkshire town where Bramshaw Castle dominated the heights, he hired a hackney carriage, and, after a cup of strong tea which pulled his jangled nerves together, he drove straight up to the sham Gothic building on the hill. It was dark, and as he drove through an avenue of beech-trees there was only a dim light about him, and deep shadows were flung across the road by the last rays of the sun. Rooks were cawing noisily on the tree-tops, and a bat skimmed in short, swift flights before the carriage. Frank was

chilly, and as the shrewd wind of a Yorkshire evening came to his face he shivered. All his courage had gone. He was filled with a nervous dread of asking Bramshaw for the money. After all, it was an audacious embassy, and in spite of their old comradeship the young earl might snub him for his impudence.

When the avenue came to an end, and spread into a sweeping carriage drive, Frank saw that the great castellated house was in darkness except where lights glimmered from the windows to the right of the archway. He got down from the hackney carriage and gave a sharp pull to the iron bell-handle, and, when he heard the prolonged jingle-jangle of the bell inside, the sound startled him and he was in a desperate state of "funk." He heard a man's footstep coming down a long passage, and he took a deep breath and prayed for self-command and a little pluck. Then bolts were unbarred and an elderly man-servant stood in the doorway, holding up a lamp.

"Is Lord Bramshaw at home?" said Frank.

"His lordship is not at home," said the man.

"Will he be long?"

"His lordship is in town."

"In town?" said Frank, and his heart went to the bottom of his boots. He had come three hundred miles and seemed to have travelled for three hundred hours, and "his lordship was in town!" What a damnable anticlimax to all his emotion!

He stood utterly nonplussed. What a fool he had been to come all this way without sending a prepaid telegram in advance!

He questioned the man at the door, who, with reluctance and a curt disrespect, divulged the fact that Lord Bramshaw was staying at the Sports Club in St. James's Square for two or three days.

Frank got back into his carriage and drove down to the

town again, and on the way he said hard things against the devil who had tricked him with such fiendish malevolence. What on earth should he do now? It was impossible to get back to town that night, and to-morrow night the paper would die. He had only twenty-four hours before him in which to save or lose the game. He had now only a gambler's chance.

Luttrell sent off a telegram to Bellamy with the news of the horrible disappointment, and another to Bramshaw at the Sports Club begging him to be there at four o'clock on the following day, as he wished to see him on a matter of life and death. That was the earliest time he could get to St. James's Square from this small Yorkshire town with an atrocious train service.

That night Luttrell put up at the Bramshaw Arms, and sat smoking for hours in the bar-parlour listening to the gossip of Yorkshire yokels, but not hearing or understanding. He was utterly wretched, and brooded over the tragedy of the fruitless journey. He slept hardly at all that night under the oak beams of his bedroom, and when he rose in the morning and shaved himself he had an aching head, and felt and looked horribly ill. There was no train to London before eleven-thirty, and he travelled back the same route on which he had come yesterday.

At four o'clock he stood in the hall of the Sports Club, staring at the heads of antelopes and at the stuffed lion, and into the gaping jaws of a grinning hippo, and waiting with a sickening anxiety for the return of the page-boy who had gone with his card to find the Earl of Bramsham.

"Will you come this way, sir? His lordship is in the smoking-room."

Luttrell drew a deep breath of relief, and thanked God he had found his man; then he followed the page, and

making his way past the outstretched legs of well-groomed, fresh-complexioned men, who were reading evening papers or sleeping as peacefully as babes in the smoking-room chairs, saw his old college chum in the far corner.

"Hulloh, Luttrell," said Lord Bramshaw, giving him a limp, plump hand. "Glad to see you. It seems centuries since we used to talk damned rot together. Have a whisky, or anything?"

Luttrell saw that his friend had changed. He had put on flesh during the past few years, and had lost the elegant, graceful figure which had given him the name of Pretty Poyning. He was now a rather stolid, flabby young man, and there was a trace of vulgarity in his manner.

Luttrell sat down and had some coffee, while Bramshaw said it was devilish funny weather for the time of year, and gave an account of a new piece at the Gaiety Theatre to which he had been the night before. There were some extremely jolly little girls on show, and if Luttrell had not been he certainly ought to make a point of going.

Half an hour passed before Luttrell could find an opening for his own line of conversation.

"Weren't you rather surprised to get a wire from me with the Bramshaw stamp on it?" he asked.

"Did you send it from Bramshaw! 'Pon my soul I didn't notice. Ghastly place, isn't it? If it weren't for my infernal title I would sell the whole bag of tricks. That Gothic castle of mine gives me the horrors every time I set eyes on it."

Luttrell plunged.

"I wanted to speak to you about something of the greatest importance."

"Let's see; you said something about life and death,

didn't you? I suppose that was hyperbole. You always used to be a fellow for picturesque imagery, Luttrell."

He smiled and looked at Luttrell in a curious way.

"You look a bit pulled down," he said. "You ought to get away to the south of France for a bit. Join me, won't you? I have taken a little box at Biarritz. There is a charming society there. All sorts of lovely ladies."

"I have to earn my living," said Frank.

"Lucky beggar," said Bramshaw. "I'll bet you don't get half so bored with yourself as I do."

This gave Frank his opportunity, and he did not let it escape. He put before Lord Bramshaw the way in which he could escape from boredom. He must buy a paper. It would give him endless interest and great power. He would be doing a great service to the country and to the Party.

"Which Party?" asked Bramshaw.

"Why, ours, of course," said Frank.

Bramshaw seemed to be groping back down the aisles of memory.

"Let's see, we used to be Social Democrats, or something, didn't we?"

"You were an ardent Liberal," said Frank, with something like irritation in his voice. The matter was too serious for jesting.

"Oh, most fellows go through that phase," said Bramshaw carelessly. "It's like measles, and poetry, and calf-love. But, of course, now I've come into the title and all that I have settled down. One has to look after one's property, and those Rads would grab every damn thing they could lay their hands on."

Frank was dismayed. This was a pretty introduction to a demand for £50,000 to support a Liberal paper!

But he rallied his forces, and appealed to Bramshaw's old idealism, his old comradeship, his sworn vows that

when he came into his money he would use it on behalf of humanity.

Bramshaw's plump face turned pink.

"Draw it mild, Luttrell," he said, laughing rather painfully. "Did I talk such asinine things as that? . . . Anyhow, it's beastly rough on a fellow to call up the indiscretions of his teens."

Luttrell shifted his ground and based his plea on more personal reasons. He gave Bramshaw an idea of the inside of a newspaper office, and explained the tragedy which would fall upon so many lives if the paper went under. It would be a bad blow to himself. Wouldn't he stretch out a helping hand for the sake of a college chum? It would mean so very little to him.

"What is it you want me to do?" said Bramshaw good-naturedly. Frank's words had touched him.

"I want you to put down £50,000."

Bramshaw put down his glass of whisky and looked as if he would have a stroke of apoplexy. He put his plump finger inside the neck of his collar and loosened it.

"£50,000!" he said. "Good God! . . . Look here, if a hundred quid are any good to you——"

Frank pleaded with him. In a low, thrilling voice he put forward every argument he could think of. He recited figures which he had learnt by heart in the train. He showed how Bramshaw could get a good profit for his money. He spoke of the immense power he would wield. He said how five hundred men and the whole Liberal Party would praise him as a benefactor. There were tears in his eyes, and his words came from a full heart.

But Bramshaw became cold and put on the solemn pomposity of a young man of high rank.

"I wish I could oblige you," he said. "But it is quite impossible. I owe a duty to my position in life, and to

my class. It would go seriously against my conscience to bolster up a Liberal paper. This Government is ruining the country. Why, damn it all, my solicitors tell me that I shall be a poor man if the financial stability of the country continues to be undermined in this disastrous way. . . . Have another whisky, Luttrell, and let's drop this most unprofitable conversation."

Luttrell did not have another whisky, but in a few minutes left the Sports Club with despair in his heart and with a bitter hatred of that fat young peer who had once been his friend.

He had failed . . . and to-night the paper would die! He had failed, and he could not get his great reward. Katherine was lost to him.

He went to his office utterly miserable. It was a quarter to six o'clock, and everything was going on almost as usual. The night men had just come in and the composers were trooping upstairs, messenger boys were bringing in press telegrams, there was all the activity of a great newspaper office. No one would dream that this night could be its last night. Even Luttrell did not believe it now that he had come back to the familiar scenes. He accused himself of romancing, and was inclined to be ashamed of his emotionalism. But presently he began to realise that things were not quite the same as usual. The day men on the literary business staff, who generally left at six o'clock, were staying on, and there was an air of suppressed excitement among them. He saw the secretary in the corridor having a whispering conversation with one of the canvassers.

"Any news?" said Luttrell, as he passed. The secretary smiled and pulled his beard. "We shall know the best to-night," he said, with a cheerfulness that was almost suspicious.

Luttrell knew that it was useless to cross-examine him,

and went to his own room. There was a full crowd there with the exception of Codrington.

Katherine came quickly to him and said "Well?" in a whisper. Then she searched his face and saw its gloom. "Oh!" she said rather piteously. Two or three men were looking rather curiously. Brandon, who seemed to know something, moved towards him and said "Come outside, Luttrell." In the passage Katherine and Brandon faced him and asked him for a word of news, bad or good.

"I have failed," he said, simply. "I did my best, but it was a wild-goose chase."

"Oh, Frank," said Katherine, "surely you could have done *something*?"

It was a reproach and it stabbed him.

"No, I could do nothing. Do you think you could have done better?"

"Perhaps," she said, and went back with a rather white face to her room.

It was the last stroke, and Frank was badly hit. He looked so knocked-out that Brandon took his arm and said, "You want something to eat and drink, old man. Let's go and have a meal. It is no use hanging about here."

"I must tell Bellamy," said Luttrell. "He is waiting for news."

But the proprietor was inside with Codrington and a stranger. Bellamy had given orders that no one was to be admitted until he rang the bell. So Frank sent in a note with a brief line of regret for the failure of his embassy, and afterwards went out to a restaurant with Brandon. They shared a bottle of wine, and it put a little heart into Frank and brought a touch of colour into his cheeks. But it was a serious meal and mainly silent. Neither of them felt in a mood for light converse. But Brandon gave Frank the latest information regarding the

situation, as far as it was known by rumour and hearsay. The general feeling in the office was that Benjamin Harrison wanted to kill his own paper. He was playing dog in the manger, and, not having made a success of the paper, he did not want any one else to do so. Undoubtedly certain offers had been made. Actual money had been paid down to get an option on it, but for some reason or other nothing had yet been settled. Of course, the truth of the whole business could not be known, perhaps never would be known. Certainly, there were traitors in the camp, and it was highly probable that the proprietor himself was playing off one combination against another in order to keep them all at bay until twelve o'clock that night, when he would issue the death-warrant.

"On the other hand," said Brandon, "the optimists still hold that Bellamy has had a trump-card up his sleeve all this time, which he will put on the table at the eleventh hour. He is an astute little diplomat."

"How about Codrington?" said Luttrell.

"He has brought his man up, and both of them are inside Bellamy's room now. I should take off my hat to Codrington if he really picked the chestnuts out of the fire."

They were silent after this until over a coffee and liqueur Brandon puffed out a cloud of smoke and said very gloomily, "God knows what will happen to us all, Luttrell, if the doors close to-night. Out into the streets we go without a penny-piece of compensation, and then it will be the law of the jungle among us. There is not room for half of us in Fleet Street if the paper goes under. New men have filled up the old places. . . . It will go badly with me. I am getting on in years, and I can't begin all over again. I have staled, and that's the painful truth."

"I am worse off," said Luttrell gloomily. "I hardly know a soul outside our own show."

They went back to the office at nine o'clock and joined their colleagues. Once again the staff waited for the verdict, and this time it was to be final. There could be no further postponement. The men talked in low voices. The hours dragged by on leaden wings. Occasionally there was a momentary excitement when Bellamy's door opened and shut. Again some of the men were working, turning out copy for the next day's paper. Again some of them tried to cheer each other up by telling funny stories, and gusts of laughter shattered the silence, but were quickly spent. Katherine came over to Frank and said, "I'm sorry. I did not mean to say what I did. I was overwrought. Forgive me, Frank, will you?"

"There is nothing to forgive," he said. "Failure is always inexcusable."

"No," said Katherine, "the men who try are the heroes."

He was glad she spoke like that. It healed his wound, and when Margaret Hubbard came and sat on the floor by the fireplace and handed up chocolates from a big box to Katherine and Luttrell and Brandon, and any others who liked to apply, the misery of this scene was softened for Frank himself, sitting on the coal-scuttle next to Katherine who was on an office stool, with Quin the other side on an upturned waste-paper basket. Katherine put her hand on his shoulder. It was a sign of sympathy and it was comforting.

At eleven o'clock there was a sensation when Silas Bellamy put his head into the room.

"Halloh," he said. "Going strong?"

They called to him and pleaded for news. Katherine sprang up and seized him by the arm and pulled him into the room.

"Tell us," she said. "For heaven's sake put us out of our misery. Is it all right with the paper?"

He laughed and stood pulling his little fair moustache. His eyes were filled with great tenderness as he looked round the room and saw so many of the men who had given loyal service to him, and who had gone on many great adventures on behalf of the *Rag*.

"The proprietor will make the announcement to you at one o'clock," he said. "Don't ask me questions, boys, and keep your hearts up."

"Not till one!" cried several voices.

"No," said Bellamy; "we must see the paper through first. The men upstairs must do their job. Then we all assemble in the Board Room."

He did not say any more about the situation, and what he had said might be taken either way. But he sat chatting for a while and told two or three merry stories and made every one laugh, and laughed himself quite naturally and with real enjoyment. Then he went away, saying that he had another conference with Benjamin Harrison.

"Lord!" he said, "how glad I will be when this crisis is over. I haven't had any sleep for two days and nights."

When he had gone there was a silence, and then Quin said, "What do you think of it? Have we turned the corner?"

"Yes," said one of the men. "He wouldn't have been so cheerful if the end was near."

"I don't know," said Margaret Hubbard thoughtfully. "There was something rather queer in his eyes."

At last one o'clock came, and from every part of the building men trooped down to the Board Room—composers, departmental editors, reporters, leader-writers, the business men—all except the machine men who were printing the morning issue. The room was dimly

lighted, but outside the windows hung the long greenish lights which had distinguished the great newspaper office at night. There was a rattle of carts in the streets and the voices of the newsvendors waiting for the first edition. But inside the room there was a silence as the great staff grouped themselves all round, the reporting staff in a bunch together near a raised dais at the end of the room, where chairs had been placed for the proprietor, the editor, the news-editor, and the business manager. Luttrell, who was next to Katherine and Margaret Hubbard, looked round upon all the faces of his colleagues. They were very grave, many of them very pale, with anxious eyes. It was not often the staff had been gathered together like this in one body, and the size of it astonished Luttrell. And he was moved with a deep emotion at the sight of all those anxious faces, and the intense silence was oppressive and rather dreadful. Then a door at the end opened and Benjamin Harrison came in, with Silas Bellamy and Vicary and the business manager.

Bellamy gave a rather timid glance towards all the men, and then the proprietor bent down and whispered a few words to him. Benjamin Harrison himself was white and haggard and very weary looking. He too looked round the room with a nervous glance. Vicary had a bull-dog look on his face and his eyes were very gloomy.

Without any preliminaries the proprietor rose, and clearing his throat spoke in a low, hesitating voice, but every word was distinct in that silent, crowded room.

"I deeply regret to say that a note, set up by different hands, so that it will be news to most of you, will appear in the morning's issue, announcing that the paper has ended its career."

He paused, but there was no sound in that room except a kind of quivering sigh, and a slight movement among the men at the back.

"Its career," said the proprietor, "has been comparatively short, but it has not been ignoble. In spite of financial failure we have done a great deal of good work, and obtained a high, perhaps even a unique reputation as a paper animated by high ideals and by an honest purpose."

He went on speaking in carefully-chosen phrases. He spoke of the great burden that had been on his shoulders—he had found it more than he could justly support—and of the immense efforts that had been made to secure fresh capital. It was with real grief, he said, that he had to admit that all those efforts had been vain—for reasons into which he need not enter. He must pay a high tribute to the staff, which had done admirable and brilliant service. He must also acknowledge his deep indebtedness to Mr. Bellamy, their gallant editor, and to Mr. Vicary their indefatigable news-editor, and to Mr. Harker their business manager, to whose work—and so on, and so on.

But what did it all matter? The men listened to these phrases, perhaps without hearing. They had heard enough. The paper was dead. In a little while they would all be on the streets. Nothing mattered but that.

Luttrell looked round at all the faces. The men seemed to have been stunned. They were staring at the proprietor in a dazed way, white to the lips. It was a sickening sight. Then he looked at Katherine by his side, and at Margaret Hubbard. Katherine was crying, quite quietly, with tears streaming from her eyes. Margaret was pale with serious, sorrowful eyes.

The proprietor sat down and then Silas Bellamy rose, and in a broken voice thanked all the men—his boys, as he called them—for their splendid, magnificent work. No editor had ever had such loyalty, nor a more brilliant and gallant staff. He could only assure them that he had done his best to save the paper. Mr. Harrison would bear

him out that he had not spared himself in his most desperate endeavours to avert this great tragedy. Even to the last hour he had hoped that some way out could be found. Fate had decided otherwise.

He, too, sat down nervously. He was deeply moved and had difficulty in hiding his emotion.

Then, for the first time, the silence was broken. The men cheered their editor with a great demonstration of enthusiasm and affection. The cheers made the window-panes rattle, and in that early hour in the morning in which the paper had died, in the dimly-lighted room, and after the long silence, the noise of those cheers was startling and extraordinarily impressive in its effect.

The business manager then rose. He was a fat, flabby man, and his plump hands fidgeted with the lapels of his frock coat. He spoke in suave, oily platitudes, lavishing praise upon their "noble, their self-sacrificing, their generous, high-souled young proprietor." He spoke in this strain for five minutes, and when he sat down he seemed to expect applause. But not a voice said, "Hear, hear," and there was no whisper of a cheer.

Everyone waited, as though something else would happen. But nothing more took place except the hurried exit of Benjamin Harrison followed by the business manager, who kept close to his coat tails, and by Bellamy and Vicary who went together speaking in low tones.

A murmur of voices rose in the room. One man fainted and was leaning back on a chair with his head flopping on his chest.

Suddenly the greenish lights hanging outside the office were put out. No doubt it was the hour for their extinction, but it seemed a symbolical act. The lights had gone out. The ship had gone down.

The men made their way into the passage. Even now they spoke only in whispers to each other, or were quite

silent, as though still stunned by the shock of calamity.

Some of them went back to their own rooms. Little Birkenshaw the sporting editor was weeping like a child, with his head on his arms outstretched upon his desk. Other men were crying, and did not hide their tears.

Percival Phillimore, the literary editor, had taken it badly. Frank met him in the passage, and he put his hand to his head and moaned.

"Oh, my God!" he said. "Oh, my God! How can I go back to my wife and children?"

Frank drew him into a side room and tried to comfort him. He seemed quite broken.

Several of the men, among them Vicary and Quin and Codrington, had gone into Bellamy's room. The Chief was very tired, very serious. He had not a single quip or jest. He was in no mood for a merry tale. He revealed some of the negotiations which had taken place, and pulled his reddish-brown eyebrows, and said, "It's more than a calamity—it's a crime. There is no earthly reason why the paper should not be flourishing. . . . I can't tell you all, but I want you to believe that I did my best."

Katherine was weeping piteously and could not be comforted. Margaret Hubbard was with her holding her hand, and Frank bent over her and whispered to her, but she wrung her hands, and said, "Go away, Frank . . . I can't bear it. Forgive me."

Margaret Hubbard said, "I think you had better call a cab for us, Frank." Then she said bitterly, "This is a black night's work. I think Benjamin Harrison ought to suffer for it."

Luttrell went for the cab, and took the two girls down to it. He would have kissed Katherine's hand, but she put her arms on his shoulders and kissed him on the lips, and her tears wetted his cheeks.

"When shall we meet again?" said Frank, "and where?"

"Come round to the flat, Frank, to-morrow," said Margaret Hubbard.

They then drove away, and Frank went back to the office which was now in semi-darkness, many of the lights having been turned out. Codrington came out of Belamy's room and put his hand on Frank's shoulder and walked with him into what had once been the reporters' room. It was now only one of the death chambers.

"Luttrell," said Codrington, "I can't believe it. I refuse to believe that the paper has stopped. It is a horrible nightmare. It cannot be true."

He sat down and put his hands to his head.

"Good God," he said, "it is too horrible!"

In little groups the men went out of the building—out into Fleet Street, where they shook hands, and then went home to tell the bad news to women who had been sitting up in loneliness.

In the streets there were groups of compositors. Some of them were cursing Benjamin Harrison with fierce oaths. Others were too broken to say anything, but stood listening in a helpless, hopeless way to their comrades. Then they too separated, and, with a "Good-night, all," went to the little houses in mean streets, where their children lay sleeping.

Luttrell and Codrington were the last men left in the office. They stayed talking for an hour. Codrington was a mere ghost of a man. His face was ashen grey and his eyes were sunken in their sockets. But he seemed loth to leave the office, and sat smoking cigarettes and indulging in a melancholy retrospect and in a still more melancholy forecast of the future.

"To me," he said, "this is utter and irretrievable ruin.

I have nothing left but my personality, which seems a poor thing to-night."

And, indeed, for the first time since Frank had known him Codrington spoke naturally and simply. The calamity had stripped him of his elegant affectations. Then at last he went with Luttrell down the office steps, and in the street they turned and looked up at the dark and silent building.

"Dead! Dead!" said Codrington, in a broken voice. He raised his hat as though in the presence of death, and then, with a wave of the hand to Luttrell, strode away.

CHAPTER XX

THE downfall of the paper was a surprise and grief to the public. Indeed, it was remarkable how much praise was given to it now that it was dead. Liberals who had never subscribed to it said that its *débâcle* was no less than a tragedy to the Party. Liberal papers which had carefully abstained from quoting it, not wishing to give a free advertisement to a rival, published leading articles in which it was declared that the disappearance of this morning journal was an incalculable loss to the English Press. Even from Conservative papers there came tributes to the high ideals, the unswerving honesty, the fair play, the brilliant literary style, and the fine tone of their "talented contemporary." As in the case of many public men, the virtues of the paper were only recognised when it had gone to the grave.

But only one London newspaper had a word of sympathy for all those men and women who, it said, "had gone into the street, and, in the present condition of the newspaper world, may find it no easy thing to obtain new places. Inevitably to many of these journalists there will be a time of anxiety, disappointment and hardship."

That expression of sympathy did not exaggerate the situation. Not within the living memory of Fleet Street had there been the downfall of so great a paper with its staff. The news of its death had come as a blow not only to the men and women in the Fleet Street office, but to many journalists scattered over Europe—the special correspondents in Paris, Berlin, Rome and other capitals, who came hurrying homewards with heavy hearts, to

increase the ranks of the outcasts, and to make the rivalry among them more deadly.

Perhaps the most pitiable thing in the calamity was this competition among comrades in misfortune, who by the law of self-preservation were bound to strive for places coveted by others as much, or more, in need of them. There was an invasion of every newspaper office in London, and it is recorded in the annals of Fleet Street that one editor of a Conservative paper received no less than nineteen visits in one morning from the staff of *The Liberal*. To each of the applicants he returned the same answer: "Very sorry, my staff is far too large already." Several editors, and not those of the hardest hearts, refused to see any members of the shipwrecked crew. They had no vacant posts, and it was waste of time to say sympathetic things.

Some men like Luttrell and Codrington had too much pride or too little "push" to send in a card to a single newspaper office.

"What's the good, my dear fellow?" said Codrington. "Let us at least wait until the crowd has cleared off a little. Then, perhaps, some office-boy will die of eating too many brandy-balls, and you or I may be given his empty stool."

Frank Luttrell was suffering severely from reaction after a month's excitement, and had already abandoned hope. He could only brood over the cruelty of his fate. Just as success had been within his grasp it had been snatched out of his hands by fickle fortune. He had been broken on the wheel of Fleet Street and flung into the dust-heap. This was the reward of his days of arduous work, of his humiliations, of his daily loss of self-respect! It would have been better for him if he had stayed at the Abbey School teaching the elements of Latin grammar to young louts. At least he would not have met Kath-

erine Halstead and lived in a dream from which he had now awakened to the cold reality of failure.

He had been brought to such a low condition of mind that he shirked meeting his old colleagues at the rendezvous which they made in the smoking-room of a Fleet Street tavern, and shut himself in his own room calculating how long his small savings would keep him this side of starvation, and shedding weak tears when he thought of the miserable prospect in front of him. With so many experienced and well-known journalists looking for jobs, he did not buoy himself up with any false hope that he would receive a favourable hearing from any editor in London.

He sat down and tried to write some special articles and short stories, or *Spectator* essays. He would not show the white feather, if he could help it, and it was just possible that he could "keep his end up," as he called it, by freelance work as in the old days before he joined the *Rag*. He had learnt a good deal since that time, and it ought to come easy to him.

But Frank Luttrell found to his increasing terror, like many other writers of temperament who have suffered from the shock of disaster, that his brain refused to work. His imagination seemed as dead as his old paper. He had not a single idea in his head, and he could not even write a paragraph of decent English. He smoked innumerable pipes, which still further hastened the ruin of his nerves, was devilishly tempted to take to drink, and only resisted the temptation because he had a photograph of Katherine Halstead on his mantelpiece, and her image in his heart. Within a few weeks of the death of the paper, he was well along that dark road which leads to the dreadful abyss of melancholia.

It was owing to Edmund Grattan that Frank was saved from that tragedy. Grattan was the Great Heart of these

days to more than one member of the *Rag*. Although for years he had lived an adventurous life and must have passed through many periods of almost starvation poverty, it appeared, according to his own statement, that the luck had been his way of late, and that he had a "stocking" full to the brim of gold pieces of the realm. He was almost blatant in his boast of wealth, and to hear him talk one might have imagined that this seedily-dressed little man who lived in a Soho slum had more money than he knew what to do with. The truth was, as Luttrell afterwards discovered, that he had a bank balance of exactly one hundred pounds, and his bragging of secret hoards was only to give him an excuse to lend five-pound notes to friends whom he knew to be destitute.

He had come round to Frank's room early on the morning after the catastrophe and endeavoured to rouse his friend's spirits by optimistic assertions that as far as Luttrell was concerned this was the very finest thing that could have happened to him. Luttrell, he said, was too fine a blade to be put to chopping wood. And varying his metaphor he went on to say that Pegasus in a newspaper cart had been a sorry sight to him. Frank was too good for Fleet Street, and he strongly advised him to abandon regular journalism, in which he would always be the slave of men with small minds, and be his own master as an essayist, novelist, playwright and historian, for all of which lines of literature he had such richly-endowed qualities.

Frank in spite of his woe was obliged to smile at this exaggeration of his talents, but he shook his head and said that he had no desire to live in a fool's paradise. He had already experienced the life of a freelance, and he had found it a Quixotic game of tilting at windmills.

Grattan inquired with the utmost friendliness into the

state of his finances, and finding that Frank had only a few pounds between him and the streets, immediately pulled out a cheque-book and a stylographic pen and demanded to know how much he would like to go on with.

"Look here, Grattan," said Frank rather fiercely, "if you think I'm going to sponge on you you're jolly well mistaken. Put that book in your pocket and leave me a little self-respect, for heaven's sake."

Grattan swore a number of lurid oaths and called him many bad names on account of his haughtiness.

"If I can't lend you a trifle when you're down on your luck," he said, "you're not the true friend I always took you to be. Why, man, I tell you it will be a kindness to relieve me temporarily of some of this filthy lucre! It will all go in wild and disgraceful orgies if you don't take care of it. Sure, and you wouldn't ruin a man's soul for the sake of your tuppenny-ha'penny pride?"

Frank thrust the little Irishman into a chair, took his pipe out of his pocket, and poked it in his mouth, exactly as if he had been an Aunt Sally.

"Have some of my 'baccy," he said, "and don't talk skybosh."

Nevertheless, Grattan's visits, which were frequent and at all sorts of odd hours—for sometimes he would do a devil's tatoo on Frank's door before he was out of bed in the morning, and at other times sing "Molly Bawn" on the staircase as he came up late at night—were very cheering to a man who, when alone, stayed too long with his elbows on the table and his head in his hands staring at the blank paper before him on which he saw dismal pictures. At times he resented the Irishman's visits, and was inclined to damn his impertinence for intruding so often. For, like all neuropaths (and Frank at this time was certainly in the first stages of neurasthenia), he found a subtle pleasure in brooding over his own wretch-

edness. It is only now, looking back upon those black days, that Frank realises all that Grattan did for him, by coming with indomitable cheeriness into his rooms and dragging him out into the streets for a luncheon at a Soho restaurant, or for a cup of tea at the club.

Margaret Hubbard was another cheerful soul who was a friend in need to some of those colleagues who had given her the nickname of "Mother." She had the same trouble with Katherine as Grattan with Frank, for Katherine's highly-strung temperament had suffered more than she knew at the time of the crisis, and immediately afterwards she fell into a kind of weakness as though all her strength had been taken from her. The doctor spoke very seriously about the first stages of tuberculosis, to which Margaret Hubbard said "Fiddlesticks!" much to the astonishment and indignation of the Harley Street physician, to whom Margaret paid two guineas, grudgingly, for what seemed to her words of extreme stupidity. Perhaps Margaret was right when she said that it was merely a case of "rundown nerves." Perhaps, however, she was more scared by the doctor's words than she allowed herself to appear. Frank suspected more than once that she had been weeping in secret, but if that were so she kept her tears to her own chamber, and to Frank, Codrington, Grattan and others—who called to inquire after Katherine and to spend an hour or two in Shaftesbury Avenue when Katherine became a little stronger and was allowed out of bed—she had always a serene and smiling face, and spoke words of dauntless courage.

This woman was stronger in misfortune than many of the men, and she bullied them heartily for their lack of grit. When Frank was pessimistic she "pitched into him," as she called it, until he began to see things in a more rosy light, and to believe that after all he need not be so wretched. When the days passed and Codrington

was still without work, waiting, like Mr. Micawber, for something to turn up, she stung him with sarcasm and desired him to tell her how long he would keep his tailor at bay, and whether he thought that God would work a special miracle for him and pay his debts.

"It is disgraceful," she said one night to both Codrington and Frank. "You young men have no self-respect. If you can't get on to another paper just yet, why don't you write novels, or plays, or stories for the *Family Herald* Supplement, or penny dreadfuls, or advertisements for Pink Pills? Something—anything rather than bemoaning your fate. Do you know what I am doing to keep my end up?"

"No," said Codrington, "something wonderful, I am sure. Is it a secret?"

"A secret? No. I am typing a work on 'The Relation of Vermin to the Distribution of Bubonic Plague.' Ninepence a thousand is my rate of pay, and the learned professor wants me to do it for sixpence, but I told him I would rather starve than be a blackleg. I am getting quite fascinated in the physiology of fleas. I had no idea they were such remarkable creatures."

Codrington shuddered and expressed the deepest sympathy with Margaret Hubbard for having to do such terrible work, which might blunt her beautiful sensibilities. But she cut him short by saying that she was proud and happy to be earning a little money in those hard times, and as for her "beautiful sensibilities," she would have him know that she did not belong to the period of Jane Austen's young women.

These words had an effect upon both the men to whom they were spoken. They made Frank feel thoroughly ashamed of himself, and that night, in order to prove to Margaret Hubbard that he was at least trying "to keep his end up," he went back and finished the last chapter

of that queer, unconventional, auto-biographical romance which had interested him exceedingly for several weeks and then had lain unfinished, accumulating dust on his desk. He packed up the manuscript in brown paper and sent it by post to Margaret Hubbard with a rather self-conscious, apologetic note, begging her to burn it if it bored her, or to advise him where to send it if she thought it was a little bit interesting. Above all things, he trusted to her honour not to show it to Katherine, because she would certainly find it an inexhaustible subject for satire.

Katherine herself had spoken words to him that day which had made him desperately anxious to get some kind of work to do. He had brought her some flowers, and they had been alone together for an hour or two while Margaret Hubbard was busily typing herself tired in the next room.

Katherine was sitting up in a high-backed, tapestried chair, and she looked very beautiful, in Frank's eyes, with her head leaning back on a cushion, and her hands, rather frail and transparent, grasping the arms of the chair.

"Frank," she said, suddenly, after they had been talking about all that was being suffered by their poor colleagues who were still without work, "why don't you make haste and get rich?"

"Ah!" said Frank, smiling woefully. "Why, indeed?"

Then he said after a pause, "What would you have me do if I were in that enviable position?"

"You needn't be so very rich," she said. "But if you had a little money to play about with, shall I tell you what I would like you to do?"

"Yes," he said, drawing his chair nearer, and bending towards her. "Yes."

"I would like you to take me away, a long way from here—to the Cornish coast, I think, or to some place where the sea is, and where there are nice little old cot-

tages with thatched roofs, and with flowers in the gardens, and with old people sunning themselves, and children playing, and I think a hill or two somewhere in the background. I should like to get away from London for a while."

"And you would like me to go with you?" said Frank eagerly, and as joyfully as though the money were in his pocket to carry out this blessed notion.

"If you were very nice to me," she said.

"Katherine!" said Frank, putting his hand on hers. "That is a divine dream!" Then he said almost in anguish, "Oh, Lord, how can I make it come true!"

"Write something good and brilliant," said Katherine. "You can do it if any one can."

"You are like Grattan," said Frank, "who tries to buck me up by calling me a universal genius."

"Oh, not universal," said Katherine, who was always candid. "But I think you might work out a corner for yourself. That imagination of yours must surely have a little kingdom of its own."

These words, which came so soon after Margaret's stimulating bullying, sent Frank home with a new determination to conquer his deadly depression and play the man. The first fruit of his resolution was, as we have seen, to finish his story and send it to Margaret Hubbard. His next struggle over his painful irresolution and morbid inactivity was to walk to Fleet Street (he economised in bus fares) and join the rendezvous of his old colleagues in the smoking-room of the wine tavern where they dropped in day by day to compare notes, to commiserate each other in a pleasurable, melancholy way, to report progress or failure in their endeavours to obtain new jobs and to envy the amazing good fortune of those who had found new spheres of activity. It occurred to Frank, truly enough, that only in the society of his fellows

would he hear the gossip of journalism and of any possible openings in which he might have a chance of getting a place.

There was something rather moving and rather good in this society of comrades in misfortune. The public which they had served so faithfully—for, after all, journalists are not the least important of public servants—did not trouble about them, did not even know their names. Nobody opened a public subscription for these shipwrecked mariners of Fleet Street, though they had kept the flag flying while the good ship was sinking and done "*Birkenhead* drill" until the lights went out. But they still clung to their old comradeship on the desert island of life where there were precious few bread-trees and no milk or honey. Unlike the Swiss Family Robinson they did not discover all kinds of precious treasures washed up by the kindly waves.

But, at least, they did not indulge like some shipwrecked mariners in cannibalism, and most of them were eager to do a good turn to a colleague provided they would not thereby cut their own throats. In a nation of individualists the first person singular was bound to be of supreme importance, but to the honour of the staff, which called itself "*late of the Rag*," it must be said that they developed a kindly altruism in misfortune.

For instance, when Phillimore had applied for an editorial appointment which, by the blessing of God, had just become vacant owing to the death of its previous holder, at a ripe old age (for Fleet Street) of fifty-seven, Phillimore, who was rejected on account of his delicate health, immediately passed the word round to his colleagues, and no one was more genuine in his congratulations than he when the place was given to one of the sub-editors of the old paper, who kept a large family at Brixton and an old mother and father in a Perthshire cottage.

Phillimore, who had only a wife and three beautiful children, consoled himself for being turned down by the thought that a more needy man had got the luck. At the same time Phillimore was badly broken up, and when Luttrell found him sitting in the smoking-room with half-a-dozen of his old colleagues, the former literary editor of the *Rag* was looking very white and woebegone.

In the downfall, distinctions of rank had been abolished, and noble editors were not above accepting a drink from junior reporters, or leader-writers from "subs." whom they had snubbed in office. Perhaps it would have been wiser if so many drinks had not been offered all round. But it was on the principle of taking in each other's washing like the old French emigrés in England, and although it came to the same thing in the long run, it was pleasant for a fellow to say, "Have a drink, old man," or "Come and have a bite with me, old chap; it is my shout to-day," knowing full well that the compliment would be returned.

As the days passed, and the weeks, the assembly became smaller. In spite of the congested condition of Fleet Street, some of the men actually did find new places. Brandon, for instance, had been quickly snapped up by a halfpenny paper, which had watched his criminal investigation work with admiration. Birkenshaw, the little sporting editor, had become an exalted being in charge of the greatest sporting page in any newspaper in England. Quin, the dramatic critic, had set up a dramatic agency and was doing a big business in lovely ladies. Vicary, the news-editor, had walked from one side of Fleet Street to the other, and had hung up his hat in an office which had long endeavoured to seduce him from the now defunct paper by offers of a prodigious salary. Vicary made use of his good fortune in the noblest way by bringing in several of his old subordinates, which un-

fortunately brought on to the street four or five men who had grown old on the staff of the other paper. He was no doubt justified in calling them deadheads, but the tragedy of a deadhead is not less tragic.

Silas Bellamy had done his best for his men, and had written round to many editors recommending this man or that for an appointment. But whether it was that an editor out of office is little better than a dead donkey, or whether there was a cruel prejudice against men who had been associated with a failure, the truth is, that in only a few cases did Bellamy's recommendations bear fruit. Frank himself received, a few days after Margaret Hubbard's lecture, the kindest note from Bellamy telling him to go round to the office of an illustrated weekly paper, where the proprietor would be pleased to see him. Frank knew the paper, though he had never met the proprietor. It was made up almost entirely of trivial little paragraphs of social and theatrical gossip, with full-page photographs of notable men and women and notorious actresses. It occurred to him on the way that this kind of work would be more uncongenial than reporting, and far more difficult to a man like himself, utterly ignorant of London society and the lovely ladies of the musical comedies. But he kept the appointment and had a miserable half-hour with a middle-aged gentleman of Jewish appearance and Saxon name, with oily curls all over his head, who blinked at him with inquisitive little eyes and seemed more anxious to know the secret history of the dead paper, the cause of its downfall, and the salary of its editor, than to discover the qualifications of Frank Luttrell for the position of sub-editor on his own weekly paper. But during the last five minutes, after Frank had disappointed him by professing (what was almost the truth) a blank ignorance of these details, the gentleman with the greasy curls cross-examined him sharply and ag-

gressively about his own work and achievements, and then rising and shaking hands with him said that he was convinced that Luttrell was too good for the job.

Frank went out into the street profoundly relieved that this at least would not be his shelter from starvation. Better to starve than to be the slave of such a task-master. So he thought then with a pride that was destined to be humbled. It is so easy to say "better to starve" when there is still a jingling guinea or two to change into rump steak and rolls and butter.

But when four more weeks had passed and he was still without work, and when he had to go round in a hurry to Grattan's rooms in Soho to borrow the five-pound note which he had refused so scornfully some time ago, he was desperately sincere in saying that he would be thankful for thirty shillings as a tram-conductor. Grattan laughed hilariously at his abject despair, and told him many thrilling tales of the way in which he had been stranded without money in half the capitals of Europe. Such experiences had not given him a wrinkle on his forehead. They had only braced him up and given him the joy of adventure. When it had been quite essential to his bodily health to get a little ready money he had always found a way, and his pen had always responded to the call. He lent Frank the five pounds in a deliciously crinkly note, and then, without much discussion on the subject, but taking command of the situation in a masterful way, sent round a hand-cart to Staple Inn, shifted Frank's private belongings into it—his books, pictures, papers, pipes, and clothes—and had them taken round to Newport Buildings, Soho.

"You're coming to stay with me for a while, my boy," he said. "I know it is delightful to live like an aristocrat in rooms once inhabited by William the Conqueror or Richard Cœur de Lion, but you can't afford such luxuries at the present time. Besides, it will be a great joy to

me to have your company, and I'm pandering to my own selfishness. . . . Oh, of course, you will have to pay your share, but I give my customers credit."

Grattan at this time was doing a series of startling articles on "The Anarchist Haunts of Europe" for an American paper which paid him the princely price of ten pounds an article. He wrote them as a rule in bed between ten and one o'clock in the morning, and afterwards went out on visits to clubs ranging from the Garibaldian in the Italian quarter to the Bath Club in Dover Street, where he met English peers, or exiled foreigners, or Fleet Street journalists, or attachés of foreign embassies and other people of high and low rank, who were delighted to give him a luncheon in return for the boon of his company and conversation. Frank therefore did not see much of him although he shared his rooms, but whenever Grattan came home his cheeriness and almost womanly kindness—he even went so far as to black Frank's boots one morning—had an invigorating effect upon his "parlour-boarder." Frank actually succeeded in writing some light articles which were accepted in two of the magazines, and in spite of Grattan's almost violent protests handed over the cheques received for them as part payment for board and lodging. This had a good effect in restoring his self-respect, and in giving him a little self-confidence. But he was still without any immediate, or indeed any remote, prospect of getting back regularly into Fleet Street, and as the days passed he tried to face as bravely as he could the painful fact that he would have to find some other line of work. Perhaps after all he would have to go back to school-mastering.

Then a wonderful thing happened to him.

One morning he received a note from Margaret Hubbard, enclosing a type-written letter.

"MY DEAR FRANK (wrote Margaret),

"It is nearly two months since you sent me that manuscript called *Richard Dream-a-Day*. I dare say you have wondered why I have been such an unconscionable time in reading it, and of course with your usual diffidence you have not said a word to me about it. (I have often seen the question trembling on your lips, but, oh no, it was never spoken!) Well, Mr. Dick Dream-a-Day, because, of course, it is yourself all the time, I now write to tell you that I read it at one sitting. It took me from three in the afternoon until two in the morning, with intervals for refreshment and odds and ends, such as tucking up Katherine in bed. When I finished it I found my eyes were all wet with tears, and I haven't cried over a book for years. My dear Frank, my dear boy, you have written a beautiful thing. It is all true and all charming, and all your good, simple, nice, kind self. If I were not in love with some one else I should be very much in love with you, after reading this. Indeed, I *am* very much in love with you, and I am sure the somebody else will not mind.

"Well, now I must confess to a little plot. I did not keep that manuscript mouldering in my drawer. I sent it off with a letter—a hot one, I can tell you, and palpitating with emotion, as we journalists say—to a man who was once a friend of mine and is now a publisher—therefore of course no longer my friend. I told him that if he did not make you a good offer for the work he would be a bigger fool than I knew him to be. Enclosed is his answer. The wretch has kept me waiting six weeks for it. It is of course a monstrously absurd price he names—in fact, the fellow is a criminal—but in this world there are harrows and toads under them. Publishers are the harrows. Anyhow, in the circumstances, you may care to

accept. I am sure the book will create a sensation, and then you can get better terms next time.

"Yours, with the deepest admiration,

"MARGARET HUBBARD."

The enclosed letter was from the publisher, who wrote as follows—

"MY DEAR MOTHER HUBBARD (Will you forgive me for using the old name?)—

"I have read the manuscript called *Richard Dream-a-Day* by your friend Mr. Francis Luttrell, and I have also obtained reports upon it from two of my readers. We concur in thinking that, in spite of certain weaknesses of construction and a somewhat emotional style, the story has distinct merits and shows real promise. The novel market is very bad just now, and first novels have but a poor chance. I am, however, willing to offer Mr. Luttrell £50 (Fifty Pounds) on account of a ten per cent. royalty and provided he gives us the offer of his next two novels on terms to be arranged between us. I think it is due to me, and to you, to say that this decision is influenced by your own recommendation, and by that very pleasant friendship which is still so delightful a memory to

"Yours very sincerely,

"JOHN BURLINGTON.

"PS.—In view of what you tell me, I shall be willing to pay the £50 on the completion of the agreement."

To Frank Luttrell these letters were astounding and full of joy. It seemed to him that Margaret Hubbard had worked a miracle in his favour. For a little while he read the words on those pieces of notepaper again and again. He felt intoxicated, almost drunk with delight.

He yelled out to Grattan who was in his bedroom, and the Irishman, coming in hastily, dressed in a ragged old robe of blue silk which had once belonged to a Chinese mandarin, found him standing in front of the fire-place with a flushed face and burning eyes.

"Grattan!" he said, thrusting the letters into his friend's hands, "Grattan, read! Oh, it is too good! It is too good!"

Then he sat down in a chair, and put his face in his hands and burst into tears.

It was very stupid of him, of course, very weak and womanish, but the fellow had been feeding on despair for three months, and this gift of success and hope, coming so suddenly and unexpectedly, had been too much for him.

Fifty pounds was not a prodigious sum. It would not keep him in the lap of luxury for more than a few months. But to Luttrell, who since the death of the paper had not earned a tenth of that sum, it seemed riches beyond the dreams of avarice. But it meant more than that. It gave him, in addition to the boundless possibilities of that ten per cent. royalty (Luttrell was innocent of publishers' accounts and of the average sale of the average novel), the promise of a literary career outside Fleet Street in which he had been, by bad luck, a failure. John Burlington had bound him to submit his next two novels, "on terms that should be arranged between them." That in itself was a promise of great things. One of the big London publishers thought it worth his while to bind him over to that clause in the agreement. It was a proof that he believed in the future of the author of *Richard Dream-a-Day*. And Frank Luttrell, whom Margaret Hubbard called Dick Dream-a-Day in her letter, proved his right to the nick-name.

Talking it over with Grattan, who was almost as joyful

as Frank himself and much more noisy in the expression of his joy, Frank mentioned one phrase of the letter which had perplexed him.

"What does Mother Hubbard mean by saying that she is in love with somebody else?"

"Ah!" said Grattan thoughtfully, "I wonder."

It was two weeks afterwards that Frank learnt the meaning of that phrase. The interpretation was given to him on the night when he received the cheque for fifty pounds from his publisher, and when he went round to the flat in Shaftesbury Avenue with a bunch of white flowers, just as in the old days before the death of the paper. The door was opened by the middle-aged woman who looked after the flat. In answer to his question she said that Miss Katherine was "hout," but that Miss Margaret was in the "droring room" with Mr. Grattan. Frank was surprised to hear that Grattan was there. He had left Soho two hours ago without saying that he was on his way to Shaftesbury Avenue.

Frank strode through the passage as a privileged visitor and went into the room without being announced. But he stopped short at the door with a little ejaculation of amazement. Grattan was in a chair by the fireside, and Margaret Hubbard was sitting on the floor with her head on his knees.

"Come in, Frank," said Margaret quietly.

"Am I in the way?" said Frank, feeling strangely embarrassed.

Margaret got up and came towards him. Her face was flushed with a warm colour, and there was a beautiful light in her eyes.

"You will never be in the way, when Edmund Grattan and I sit by the fireside," she said. Then she stretched out her hands, and said, "Frank, we will take you into our little secret. Not even Katherine knows, but you

shall know. . . . Edmund Grattan and I are going to be married."

"Great Scott!" said Frank boyishly. "You don't mean to say so!"

Margaret laughed at him, a sweet low, joyous laugh.

"It is surprising, isn't it? . . . Every one and myself thought I should live and die an old maid. . . . But, oh, I am so glad, Frank. I did so hate loneliness and lack of love."

She broke down a little and laughed through tears, and said, "The little Irishman has taken pity on me."

Frank could say nothing but "Mother Hubbard! Mother Hubbard!" in a husky voice, and then he kissed her hand, and afterwards went over to Grattan, who was looking like a school-boy, caught in the act of stealing apples, and grasped both his hands, and said, "I can hardly believe it. It is like a fairy-tale! Anyhow, thank God for it. You and Mother Hubbard will be a perfect pair."

He said other foolish things not knowing what he was saying, but his excitement and gladness were pleasing to those two lovers, who spoke of themselves as "old fogeys."

Later on in the evening Grattan made Frank's pulse beat by saying, "We'll have a double marriage, my boy—Mother Hubbard and I, and you and Katherine; and all the boys and girls of Fleet Street shall come to our wedding and throw old shoes at us."

"By Jove," said Frank, "that would be pretty good, wouldn't it?"

Then he told them of a little plan that had come into his head a day or two ago, and he asked them whether they thought it would be pleasing to Katherine. It seemed to him that it was no use hanging round Fleet Street any longer. The street did not want him. It had no use for

him. But away down in the country there was an old Rectory with heaps of spare room, and a father and mother who were always writing to him to come back. The Rectory was in the heart of Somersetshire, in the most lovely country, and the garden was full of flowers. It seemed to him that if Katherine would marry him, and share the old home which would be rent free to them, they could be as happy as birds. He would write his novels and anything else that came into his head, and Katherine could write special articles, or nothing at all if she felt inclined to drop her pen and take to gardening. And with even the smallest income they would be quite comfortable, and live quietly, and enjoy peace and liberty. . . . How did the notion strike them?

Margaret said the notion struck her famously. It would be the best thing in the world for Katherine, and quite the best thing for Frank. They would get away from the toil and turmoil of Fleet Street, and have elbow-room for their two little white souls.

Frank did not say anything on the subject to Katherine that night when she came home from a visit to Bellamy and his wife. She seemed rather excited by the visit to "the Chief," as they used to call him, and when Mother Hubbard told her the great secret about Edmund Grattan she flung her arms round the woman who had been more than a sister to her, and for the rest of the evening she was so absorbed in the idea of a married Mother Hubbard and of a Papa Grattan that Frank did not have a little ghost of a chance to put forward his own idea.

That chance came on the following day when Edmund Grattan took Margaret to the Zoo, to do a little courting, as he called it in his whimsical way. It seemed to Frank highly characteristic of both these good people that they should choose such a place for such a purpose. He could imagine that afternoon's "courting." Grattan would cer-

tainly buy buns for the bears, and sprats for the sea-lions, and he would moralise in the monkey-house, and Margaret and he would enjoy themselves in a quiet way as if they were children out for a holiday. He afterwards learnt that his imagining had not been wrong, for they had done all these things, and had even gone for a ride on the elephant, hand in hand.

Their absence left him alone with Katherine. He noticed that she was looking unusually well and seemed in brighter spirits than she had shown since the death of the paper. They had a merry and delightful time toasting tea-cakes together, both down on their knees before the drawing-room fire with their heads close together, and afterwards, when they came to eat the cakes, Frank was careful to hide the burnt sides which had unfortunately gone against the bars while he was watching how beautiful Katherine's face was in the ruddy firelight. But Katherine detected these secret sins, and as a punishment made him eat the results of his own carelessness. She said it would have been an admirable punishment to King Alfred. Afterwards they cleared away the tea-things and washed them up, because the old woman had got a day off, and this duty seemed to Frank a foretaste of the joys of domesticity with Katherine to which he looked forward as he might to heaven, had he been more pious than he was.

It was afterwards in the drawing-room, when the blinds had been drawn and the lamp turned up, that Frank said what he had been longing to say. Katherine gave him the opening by talking of his novel, which she had just read in proof form—the publisher had been generously quick in getting it into type—and admired with an enthusiasm as warm as that of Margaret, who had been its fairy godmother.

“When are you going to write the next?” she asked.

And Frank, after a short pause, said, "Pretty soon, I think, if you will help me, Katherine."

She raised her eyebrows a little, and laughed and said, "I? Why, what can I do to help you, Frank?"

He said that she could do everything; and then, nervously at first, but afterwards glowing with enthusiasm for what was his brightest dream, put forward that scheme which he had outlined to Margaret and Grattan. He had often described his own home to Katherine and Margaret, but never before with such tenderness and eloquence. He told her of the garden with its broad, smooth lawn, with the old beech-tree in the middle, and of the winding paths that went through the little wood at the bottom, which his father called the "arboretum," and of the flower-beds on the sunny side of the house, from which a fragrant scent came through the open windows. Beyond the lawn were hayfields, and then a yard-wide stream, and then, stretching away into a purple distance, a sweep of rising ground, girdled by high woods which were caught on fire by the sun in the afternoons. The village was a dear old place too, with little thatched cottages built of yellow stone two and three centuries ago, and with a farm-house much older, and barns which had stored grain under their timbered roofs when Elizabeth was queen. Katherine would revel in all this. It would be a change from Fleet Street! And there in the Rectory was his quiet old father, who would treat her with his exquisite, old-fashioned courtesy, though he would be very shy of her at first—and his mother, who was still almost young, and who would take her to her heart at first sight, and be mother and sister and servant to her; for her great pleasure was to wait upon other people, and to mend or make their clothes, and to cook dainty things, and in her quiet, "unfussy" way to give them every comfort in the house. Frank would love to see Katherine

and his mother together. They would be good friends, and she would not be dull while he pegged away at his novels and other literary work, and earned an income which, in the country, would keep them out of poverty.

"Katherine," said Frank. "How does the idea strike you?"

While he had been speaking she had sat with her head slightly turned away from him, with her pointed chin dug into the palm of her hand, and with her eyes gazing thoughtfully into the fire. She listened to him quietly and without interruption—his words flowed from his lips—and when he finished she gave a little quivering sigh, but otherwise was silent.

"It would be an idyll," said Frank. "What do you say to it?"

When she turned her head and looked up into his face he saw that her eyes were moist with tears.

"Frank," she said, "you make me feel a very wicked woman."

He threw his head back and laughed, but his eyes had a scared look in them. He was rather frightened by Katherine's queer gravity.

"No, don't laugh," she said quickly; "I mean it."

"What do you mean? What has my idea got to do with your alarming wickedness?"

He spoke lightly, but he felt chilled. His words had not made Katherine's eyes dance with that gladness which he had hoped to see in them.

"My poor Frank," said Katherine, "you think I am jesting. . . . Oh, I wish it were nothing but a jest! When you were speaking just now, making up that beautiful fairy-story of me and you in the quiet country, I wondered for a little while whether I could make it come true."

Frank was on his knees before her, and took the hand

that twisted and untwisted a handkerchief on her lap, and put his arms round her waist.

"Make it come true," he said. "For God's sake make it come true. Why not?"

"Because it is a fairy-tale," said Katherine, "and it could never happen in real life. Shall I tell you what would happen?"

"Don't tell me anything cruel," he said.

"The truth is always rather cruel in this world. . . . This is what would happen, my poor Frank. You would earn a hundred pounds a year at the very most——"

"It would be enough!"

"And at the worst, because your next novel might be a failure, nothing at all. We should be pensioners, anyhow, on your father and mother, who are poor themselves. That would be unbearable if we had any pride—and I am very proud. . . . And because I am proud, Frank, nothing would happen as you have said. I should quarrel with your mother, for instance——"

"It couldn't be done," said Frank. "Nobody could quarrel with her."

"I should," said Katherine firmly, as if she had made up her mind to quarrel. "I should love her, I know, if I went to visit her now and again, but not if I were living with you in her house. She would never forget that she is your mother, and I should never forget that I was your wife."

Frank would have argued the point. Like all men he could not understand this point of view. But Katherine put her hand over his mouth, and went on with her dreadful tale of truth."

"The country would be exquisite at first. Oh, I could smell those flowers when you talked about them! I should love to go into the country for a month—three months. But after three months, six months, a year I

should hate it and go mad. The silence, the dark nights, the lonely woods, the same village street, the same village faces, the narrow village gossip, the squire with his same old stories, the squire's wife in her one silk dress, the utter exile from all the thrill of life—oh, it would be impossible to me, I could not bear it."

"We would come back to town," said Frank. "We would take a flat in the centre of things."

"We could not afford it," said Katherine. "We should be too poor."

"Who knows?" said Frank with desperate cheerfulness. "I may be rich and famous by that time."

"But supposing you were not? Supposing we were still so poor that I had to cook the meals and nurse the babies—oh yes, there might be babies."

"I pray God there may be babies," said Frank.

"No," said Katherine, "not on £120 a year. I am not cut out for it."

She burst into tears and said, "That is why I said I was wicked, Frank. If I were good and simple, like you, I would take all the risks and be glad of all the drudgery. If I were good, your fairy-tale would all seem true to me. . . . But I am not good . . . and I know it would never come true."

"Well, let us drop the fairy-tale," said Frank, very gloomily. "What do you want to do, Katherine?"

"I only want one thing."

"Tell me," he said, very gently. "I am not a cad. I will try to do anything to make you happy."

"I want to go back to Fleet Street."

"Is that the secret?" said Frank, rather bitterly. "Are you one of those people who can never leave it?"

"Yes, I am one of those people."

She spoke quickly and rather feverishly.

"I must go back. I shall never settle down to the

hum-drum after all the rush and scurry of things. It is in my blood now. I must be seeing things and doing things. I want the old adventures, all the friends, and the good fun, and the hard work, and the long hours, and the indignities and the joys of journalism. Frank, don't you understand? You have been a journalist. You know what it means?"

"Yes," he said. "I understand."

He understood only too well. He too hankered to be in the turmoil again, and because he was outside he had tried to forget it and build up this "fairy-tale," as Katherine called it, of a quiet country life. But even when he had spoken with glowing enthusiasm of his old home and peaceful countryside a little voice had whispered to him that it would be a life of exile and loneliness. What could he say without lying? He would not lie, and so he said to Katherine, "I understand."

After a little while, when they were less emotional, Katherine went to a drawer in a cabinet and took out a letter which she handed to Frank.

"Read it," she said.

Frank read it as if it were his death-warrant. It was a letter from Silas Bellamy, telling Katherine that upon his recommendation the editor of a Conservative daily paper was willing to engage her as a lady reporter, at a salary of £4 a week.

Frank folded up the note in its first creases, and handed it back.

"And you will accept?" he said.

She looked at him in a curious, wistful way.

"Do you ask me to refuse? . . . If so, I will, Frank."

He was silent for a moment, and then said quite quietly and bravely—

"No, I do not ask you. For your sake I hope you will accept. It is a good offer."

Katherine slipped down on her knees and put her arms about him.

"Frank," she said, "don't look so sad. You hurt me with your white face. We are both young . . . in a few years perhaps——"

Frank Luttrell spoke in a low voice, and the words were to himself rather than to the girl whose arms were clinging to him.

"I shall be out in the cold," he said.

Frank stayed two months longer in London, but he was very miserable, and his low spirits prevented him from doing any successful work. Katherine had gone to her new place, and he saw but little of her, as she was out early and late. At last he decided to accept the urgent entreaties of his father and mother to go home to them. Although in London he was not in Fleet Street, and his prophecy to Katherine was fulfilled. He was "out in the cold." Most of his old colleagues had found corners for themselves—many of them on sadly-reduced salaries in positions of less distinction. Even the rendezvous in the Fleet Street tavern had been discontinued, and when Frank went there one day, he drank a cup of coffee in loneliness and the waiter told him that "all the gentlemen had disappeared one by one. . . . It makes a difference to me, sir."

It made a greater difference to Frank, because it brought home to him rather cruelly that he was a derelict in Fleet Street. He was now eager and anxious to get away into the country where, perhaps, he would not feel the loss of his old associates and work so acutely. He stayed only for one event. He was best man to Edmund Grattan on his marriage with Margaret Hubbard. They were married at St. Ethelburga's Catholic Church, and it was a journalistic wedding. Many members of Frank's

old paper were present, and journalists from other papers who had affectionate regards towards the little Irishman, and in their time had been among "Mother Hubbard's" unruly boys. The most remarkable figure in church was that of Christopher Codrington, whose great height always distinguished him in an assembly. He adorned a grey frock suit of the most elegant style. Obviously it was the first appearance in public of clothes worthy of their wearer, and an honour to their tailor. Frank, who stood next to him, noticed that he said his prayers into a new silk hat of noble architecture and astonishing brilliance. Evidently he was very prosperous. When Frank had a chance of speaking to him Codrington said that happily he had been favoured by a little sunshine in his leaden-hued existence. Through the influence of a friend he had obtained an appointment as advertisement writer to the Hilarity Restaurant, and he found it more profitable than ordinary journalism. He begged Frank, earnestly, to turn his attention to the gentle art of advertising.

After the ceremony Margaret was very full of tenderness and gladness and kissed Frank on the forehead in the vestry, whispering to him that her cup of joy would have been full to the brim if Katherine and he had stood before the altar with them and made "a double event." Unfortunately Katherine was not even in the church, for she had been sent off to describe another wedding of more public interest, and the law of Fleet Street had to be obeyed.

But she was at home in the evening at Shaftesbury Avenue, where Edmund Grattan and Margaret Hubbard had their first supper as man and wife. Grattan had taken over the flat, and it was understood that Katherine was to stay with them.

Frank said good-bye to those three friends quietly enough, though his heart was very full.

"I am going off into the country to-morrow," he said, "and if I have any luck I hope to get on with a second novel."

Katherine was rather silent after that, and in the hall, when she helped him on with his coat, she seemed loth to let him go.

"Don't stay away too long, Frank," she said, "and write to me every day."

For a few moments they clung to one another, and he kissed her as though he would never see her again. Then he went away, and early next morning went down to his old home in Somersetshire.

It was curious how quickly he seemed to slip back into the old life again. His father was whiter and more absent-minded. His mother's hair was streaked with silver threads, the dog had lost its teeth, village children had grown up to be strapping lads and lasses who courted in the lanes, two or three old familiar faces had gone from the place for ever, but otherwise everything was the same as when he had left it for the Abbey School at King's Marshwood, and afterwards for Fleet Street. His father still read the classics in the evening, with the back of his chair against the table and the lampshade tilted so that the light fell over his shoulder. His mother still played the old tunes, dreaming at the far end of the big room in half darkness. The bear-skin rug on which he had lain as a boy had lost some of its hairs, but was still there. On his bedroom shelf were the old dog-eared books of his boyhood, with the green-backed volume of Grimm's *Fairy Tales*. Everything was the same except Frank himself, and he was not the same as in those early days.

For a time he enjoyed the peace and beauty of the old

home, and his soul was refreshed and purified. But gradually the quietude ceased to be a balm to him and became an irritant. Sometimes, when he went for a walk in the woods, the stillness was almost terrible. He yearned for the roar of traffic, he would have given half a sovereign to hear the jingle-jangle of a hansom cab. He had strange psychological experiences. Though Fleet Street was a hundred and twenty miles away he was haunted always by the thought of it. If a church bell struck six he would say to himself "the night men are just coming in." When he lay awake at night and heard the clock of his father's church chime twelve he would think "the first edition is just going to press."

When the village postman brought the *Daily Telegraph* he would open its pages and its headlines would give him a kind of nostalgia. "Great fire in the City." He might have been there watching the flames and seeing the work of rescue. "The Kaiser at the Guildhall." That was a scene he would have been sent to if the *Rag* had not gone under. Each event of everyday history reminded him of the old colleagues who were now on other papers, going here, there and everywhere, interviewing, describing, criticising. They were still the lookers-on behind the scenes of life. He had been one of them, and now he was out of it, out in the cold.

Katherine wrote to him three times a week, always affectionately, always hurriedly—swift, light-hearted, delightful letters, full of the "shop," and the gossip, of the street of adventure. He read them feverishly and eagerly, as though their words were magic spells, but each letter increased his restlessness, his yearning to get back again to Katherine and life. His mother and father understood a little of what was passing through his mind, but only a little. They saw that he was fretful, and that he did not settle down into the ruck of the old life. But

they put it all down to Katherine, whom he had described to them in so many letters and about whom he was now strangely silent. They could not understand that journalistic life could have any appeal to him. He described some of the incidents of his career in Fleet Street, the indignities and hardships of the profession, the squalor and triviality of it all, and his father would say again and again, "Ah, Frank, you are well out of it. It is not the work for a gentleman."

Then his first novel came out and was well received in the press, and obtained high praise from the clergymen's wives in the neighbourhood, who called in old-fashioned vehicles in the hope of seeing the young literary man whom they had known as a shy and silent boy. They found him still taciturn, but quite polite and nice, and they were rather proud of having a real novelist on their list of acquaintances. Financially, however, the book was not triumphantly successful. Frank received another cheque for twenty pounds on account of royalties, and that with a few odd guineas earned from time to time by quiet essays which appeared in the paper which had first encouraged his literary ambitions, the *Spectator*, was all he earned during the first half-year of his exile.

But he now completed a second novel. It was a story of London life again, with a stronger plot and a more passionate interest. His father, to whom he read it out, was frankly amazed that Frank should reveal such a knowledge of the human heart, and was rather nervous as to the way in which he had gained such an experience. His mother, who was a delicate and discriminating critic, did not care for it as much as she had liked *Richard Dream-a-Day*, but admitted that it might be more popular. Frank sent it to the publisher of his first novel, and at the end of another three weeks received an offer of eighty pounds for the entire copyright. It was a blow

to his hopes. He had believed that on the strength of his first success his new book would be worth at least £150. Even that would be poor payment for six months' work. Certainly there was no living to be made by novel-writing.

But a few days later he was consoled for this disappointment by a letter he received from Silas Bellamy, offering him a place on a paper to which he had just been appointed editor.

"I have not forgotten your work on the late lamented," wrote Bellamy, "and I shall be proud and glad if you will join me again, at the same salary."

Frank sent him a telegram ten minutes after he had read the letter.

"I accept with joy."

At the same time he sent a line to Katherine Halstead "I am coming back to Fleet Street."

And so this story ends, not nicely finished off, with wedding bells in the last line, as all good stories should, but incomplete and unsatisfactory like so many stories of real life. As the biographer of Frank Luttrell, journalist, I should have been glad to have married him happily to Katherine Halstead, but when I met him last week in Fleet Street he was still a bachelor. Yet in spite of being overworked and looking worn and rather worried, he was resolutely cheerful with me.

I know him well enough to ask a plain question plainly, and I said, "Frank, when are you going to be married to Mistress Kate?"

He laughed in his boyish, nervous way, and flushed up to the forehead.

"Perhaps you had better ask the lady," he said.

He spoke these words to avoid a direct answer, but I

have decided to act upon them. I shall talk seriously to Katherine Halstead the very next time I see her. Frank is too good a fellow to be spoilt by a girl who cannot make up her mind.

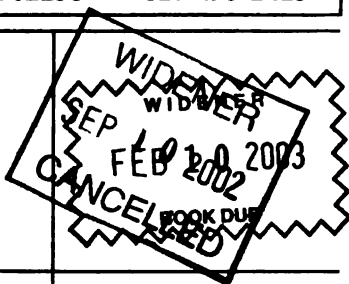
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